MARK AND ASENETH, ODD BEDFELLOWS?

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INTRODUCTION

By most counts Joseph and Aseneth and the Gospel of Mark are dissimilar. Joseph and Aseneth is a Jewish narrative. Mark is a product of the early Jesus movement. Generically, Aseneth is a product of, or at least influenced by, the Greco-Roman romance novels. Mark by the βίοι (“Lives”). Joseph and Aseneth has a feel-good, romantic ending. Boy and girl end up together and live happily ever after. Mark’s ending is a bit more stark and dark. The protagonist, abandoned by his followers, is tortured and dies. He resurrects, but his devotees fail to tell anyone about it. Joseph and Aseneth unashamedly promotes Jewish monotheism over Egyptian idolatry. The Gospel of Mark aims to convince its hearers of Jesus’s messianic identity and that the Jewish deity has inaugurated a new age through this agent. Joseph and Aseneth features a strong female lead, while Mark a male with a band of mostly male disciples.

In many ways, then, the two narratives are miles apart. They are not really related theologically. Their content greatly differs. And, most importantly, they are the products of very different genres. Yet despite these dissimilarities, Joseph and Aseneth and the Gospel of Mark exhibit remarkable affinities as to their linguistic style and the manner by which they evoke intertexts.

What I will attempt to do in the next twenty-five minutes or so is elucidate these similarities. I will admit at the outset that this is a fly-over approach to the affinities the two narratives share. This paper is a condensation of a great deal more work. The handout that I have provided should help visualize the parallels as we move through them more quickly than I would like. After exposing the stylistic and intertextual resonances between Joseph and Aseneth and Mark, I will offer a reason for them.
PARATAxis IN MARK AND ASENETH

Both Joseph and Aseneth and Mark are paratactically structured.⁷ That is, episodes in both narratives are placed side-by-side without explicit linguistic connections between the episodes. Eighty of Mark’s eighty-eight pericopae—91% percent—begin with the conjunction “and” (καί).⁶ This is comparable to Joseph and Aseneth, wherein 66% (twenty-eight out of forty-two) of the total pericopae begin with the same connective. It is also worth noting that eleven of the fourteen pericopae that do not begin with “and” in Joseph and Aseneth are in a sort-of extended liturgical lament section of the narrative.⁸ When the story is in direct narration 90% (28/31) of the pericopae begin with “and” (καί).

But it is not just at the episodic level that both narratives are structured paratactically. This is also the case at the level of sentences and clauses. “And” (καί) begins 254 of Joseph and Aseneth’s 312 sentences, 81.4%. In Mark the number is about 65%.⁸ The results are much the same at the clausal level.⁹

Another way to expose the similarity between Mark and Aseneth with respect to their paratactic structures is to look at the total number of times “and” (καί) is used in each narrative. In Mark, καί occurs 1,100 out of a total 11,138 words. This is 9.9% of the total words in the gospel or once for every 10.12 words. This is slightly less frequent than in Joseph and Aseneth, where “and” (καί) occurs 1,034 times out of a total 8,230—12.6% of its total words or 1 “and” for every 7.96 words.

Because “and” (καί) is employed so frequently in Mark and Joseph and Aseneth, we find that other connectives are relatively sparse. In Joseph and Aseneth there only 190 total instances of connectives that are not “and” (καί). Thus, καί appears almost five times more
often than all other connectives combined. In Mark, the results are similar, though not quite as pronounced. There are 649 instances of connectives that are not “and” (καί) in Mark. So “and” (καί) is employed about twice as often as all other conjunctions combined in the gospel.

It is instructive that later editors of both Joseph and Aseneth and Mark found their extensive use of parataxis objectionable. Matthew and Luke not only alter Markan parataxis, but their shared and unique materials are not characterized by this linguistic structure as Mark is. Luke uses καί about 33% less frequently than Mark and Matthew about 45%. In unique Lukan and Matthean materials, parataxis is even less frequent. Moreover, narrative units in Matthew rarely begin with καί. In the cases where a Matthean episode does begin with the connective, Matthew has altered Mark’s standard format for beginning a new pericope. Mark typically begins new units with καί followed by an indicative verb. More often than not, Matthew simply removes a Markan καί at the beginning of a pericope. The situation is much the same in Luke. In short, Matthew and Luke have an aversion to Mark’s prominent parataxis.

When we turn to redaction of Joseph and Aseneth, we find a similar allergy to parataxis in certain redacted renditions of the narrative. There is a later manuscript family of Joseph and Aseneth that thoroughly edits many of the characteristic stylistic features of the earlier text, including its highly paratactic structure. In this later witness, “and” is used about 30% less frequently than in the earlier manuscripts. This is almost identical to Mark and the later synoptics. Moreover, Matthew, Luke, and this later manuscript tradition of Joseph and Aseneth replace καί with a wider range of conjunctions.

Perhaps the best way to put this all together and see the similar paratactic structures of Mark and Aseneth is to quickly look at a text from each. I’ve included these both on the
handout. First, let’s look at Joseph and Aseneth 10.4–5. This section follows upon Joseph’s rejection of Aseneth, and tells how she prepares to lament her lost love:

"And Aseneth hastened and she took down the leather curtain from the door and she filled it with ashes and she brought it into the upper-room and she put it on the ground and she locked the door securely and she placed the iron bar on it sideways and she groaned with great groaning and weeping."

Examples similar to this could be multiplied. While this “sentence” has eight clauses in a row connected by καί, there are others in Joseph and Aseneth that coordinate up to thirteen clauses with the connective.

And from Mark, let’s look at 1.21–22:

"And they entered Capernaum And then on the Sabbath When they entered into the synagogue, He taught. And they were amazed by his teaching, Because he was teaching them with authority, And not as the scribes."

In a manner akin to Joseph and Aseneth, these sentences in Mark are characterized by parataxis. Neither one of the examples is out of the ordinary for Aseneth or Mark, respectively. We could turn to nearly any pericope in either text and find this kind of syntax.

To summarize my argument in this section: both Mark and Joseph and Aseneth are paratactically structured at the level of episodes, sentences, and clauses. The narratives employ “and” (καί) at similar frequencies to the expense of other conjunctions. Later editors of both
narratives found this preponderance of “and” (καί) disagreeable and curbed its frequency in the narrative at similar rates. As a result, the later version of Joseph and Aseneth, the Gospel of Matthew, and the Gospel of Luke all contain fewer “ands” (καί) and a greater number of other conjunctions such as “but” (δέ), “then” (τότε), “for” (γάρ), “therefore” (ἄρα), and others. These narratives are not paratactically structured to the extent that Mark and Aseneth are.

IMPRECISE INTERTEXTUALITY IN MARK AND ASENETH

The other similarity between Joseph and Aseneth and Mark that I wish to highlight is the manner by which they recall the Septuagint. Both do so in an imprecise way. Applying Richard B. Hays’s well-known taxonomy of intertextuality, we can say that each narrative most frequently evokes Jewish Scripture by echoing it, rather than citing it. xxii

Joseph and Aseneth never directly quotes a text. In fact, there are only two references to writing in the entire narrative. xxii This is not to say that the text does not exhibit familiarity with the Septuagint, or at least traditions from the Septuagint. xxiii On the contrary, there are quite a few echoes of Jewish Scriptures peppered throughout Joseph and Aseneth. The story is, after all, an expansion of the brief reference to Aseneth in Genesis. In the handout I’ve included a few different passages in which Joseph and Aseneth indirectly alludes to the Septuagint using key lexemes and phrases. But I want to draw attention to one in particular. This is Joseph and Asene 27, which is no doubt reminiscent of the story of David and Goliath found in 1 Samuel 17. xxiv

This episode occurs towards the end of the narrative. Joseph and Aseneth have already gotten married and are parting ways for a limited time. Joseph is off to act as savior of Egypt,
distributing grain in the cities. And Aseneth plans to travel to their home out in the country (τὸν ἀγρὸν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν) to await Joseph’s return. On her way, however, she runs into an ambush by Pharaoh’s son—he’s the story’s primary antagonist—, who has contrived a plan to murder Joseph, kidnap Aseneth, and take her as his wife. Up against Pharaoh’s son and fifty of his soldiers, all hope looks to be lost for the heroine. However, Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, steps in and fights quite Davidically. Joseph and Aseneth 27.1–5 reads:

Καὶ ἦν Βενιαμὴν καθεξόμενος μετ’ αὐτῆς ἐπὶ τοῦ ὀχήματος. Καὶ ἦν Βενιαμὴν παῖδάριον ἵππου ὡς ἐτῶν δέκα καὶ ὅκτω, καὶ ἦν ὑπ’ αὐτῶν κάλλος ἀρρητόν καὶ δύναμις ὡς σκύμνου λέοντος, καὶ ἦν φοβοῦμενος τὸν θεόν. Καὶ κατεπήδησε Βενιαμὴν ἐκ τοῦ ὀχήματος καὶ ἔλαβε λίθον ἐκ τοῦ χειμάρρου στρογγύλου καὶ ἐπλήρωσε τὴν χείρα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἠκόντισε κατὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ Φαραώ καὶ ἐπάταξε τὸν χρόταφον αὐτοῦ τὸν εὐώνυμον καὶ ἐτραυμάτισεν αὐτὸν τραύματος μεγάλῳ καὶ βαρεῖ. καὶ ἔπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ ἱππου αὐτοῦ [ἡμιανης τηγχανων]. Καὶ ἀνέδραμε Βενιαμὴν ἐπὶ πέτρας καὶ εἶπε τῷ ἧμιοχῳ τῆς Ἀσενῆτ. δὸς δή μοι λίθους ἐκ τοῦ χειμάρρου πεντήκοντα. Καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ [λίθους πεντήκοντα]. Καὶ ἠκόντισεν τοὺς λίθους Βενιαμὴν καὶ ἀπέκτεινε τοὺς πεντήκοντα ἄνδρας τοὺς ὡς μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ Φαραώ καὶ ἔδυσαν οἱ λίθοι ἐπὶ τοὺς χρωτάφους ἐνὸς ἐκάστου αὐτῶν.

“And Benjamin was seated with her [Aseneth] on the chariot. And Benjamin was a strong young man, eighteen years old, and he was very good-looking and as powerful as a young lion and he feared God. And Benjamin leapt down from the chariot and he took a round stone from the brook and he filled his hand and he chucked it at the son of Pharaoh and he struck his left temple and wounded him severely and he fell off his horse nearly dead. And Benjamin ran onto a rock and said to Aseneth’s chariot driver, “Bring me fifty stones from the river!” And he gave him the fifty stones, and Benjamin threw the stones and killed the fifty men that were with Pharaoh’s son, and the stones sank into the foreheads of each one of them.”

No doubt the content of the narrative recalls David’s battle with the giant. There are reminiscences of 1 Samuel 17 throughout this episode, but 1 Sam 17.49 LXX has the densest verbal resonance with Joseph and Aseneth 27:
καὶ ἐξέτεινεν Δαυιδ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ κάδιον καὶ ἔλαβεν ἐκεῖθεν λίθον ἕνα καὶ ἐσφενδόνησεν καὶ ἐπάταξεν τὸν ἀλλόφυλον ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτοῦ, καὶ διέδυ ο λίθος διὰ τῆς περικεφαλαίας εἰς τὸ μέτωπον αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν.

“And David reached his hand into the bag and took one stone from there and slung it and it struck the foreigner on his forehead and the stone penetrated through his helmet into his forehead, and he fall on his face to the ground.”

There are some key lexemes that make it certain that the story from the LXX is being recalled here. Both Benjamin and David are described as a “young man” (παιδάριον)xxv and “good-looking” (κάλλος).xxvi They both take stones (λίθους) from a stream (ἐκ τοῦ χειμάρρου) in denominations of five and use them as their missiles of choice,xxvii which subsequently strike (ἐπάταξε[ν]) an area of their enemy’s head.xxviii But the intertextuality is inexact. Different words for forehead,xxix sling,xxx sink,xxxi, and roundxxxii are used in each account. David takes five stones, Benjamin fifty. And perhaps most importantly, the way that each narrative describes the antagonist’s demise differs. In 1 Samuel, David rushes to his felled enemy, takes Goliath’s sword, and chops off his head.xxxiii Benjamin similarly runs up to Pharaoh’s son in Joseph and Aseneth 29.2 and takes his enemy’s sword from its scabbard.xxxiv But before he can lop off the antagonist’s head his brother Levi intervenes, reminding Benjamin of Aseneth’s message that “it is not fitting for a God-worshipper to repay evil for evil” (καὶ οὐ προσήκει ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεὶ ἀποδοῦναι κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ). Benjamin desists and instead the brothers wash the blood off Pharaoh’s son, bandage him, and return him to his father.xxxv And so unlike 1 Samuel and the Gospel of Mark, there are no beheadings in Joseph and Aseneth.

The point here is that Benjamin’s stone-slinging account in Joseph and Aseneth resembles 1 Samuel 17, but it also differs. Key lexemes and themes make it absolutely certain that the text is being recalled, but it is never quoted. The longest verbatim overlap between the texts is five words: καὶ ἔλαβε τὴν ῥομφαίαν αὐτοῦ (“And he took his sword”).xxvi The
intertextuality between Joseph and Aseneth and the Septuagint in this case, as with most others in the narrative, is imprecise. xxxvii

Mark exhibits a similar imprecision of intertextuality. However, the gospel is often more self-conscious about its engagement with biblical texts. References to writing appear more frequently in Mark than in Joseph and Aseneth. xxxviii On the handout, I’ve listed a few places where Mark possesses a different kind of imprecise intertextuality than Joseph and Aseneth.

There is the famous mix-up between Ahimilech and Abiathar in Mark 2, the mis-attribution of the composite citation to Isaiah in Mark 1, and the phantom reference to what is written about the Son of Man in Mark 9. While these are all revelatory of Mark’s imprecise intertextuality, I want to look briefly to Mark 4.35–41, where Mark’s evocation of the Jonah tale resembles Joseph and Aseneth’s echo of 1 Samuel 17.

Mark 4.35–41 recalls Jonah by mirroring the content and order of Jonah 1.1–15. xxxix There are also a number of specific words that are shared between the two texts that make it unmistakable that Jonah is one of the intertextual backdrops of the Markan pericope. xl Four parallels are noteworthy.

First, the rising of the storm puts both Jonah’s and Jesus’s boat in danger:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jonah 1.4:</th>
<th>Mark 4.37:</th>
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<tr>
<td>καὶ κύριος ἐξήγειρεν πνεῦμα εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, καὶ ἐγένετο κλύδων μέγας ἐν τῇ θαλάσσῃ, καὶ τὸ πλοῖον ἐκινδύνευεν συντριβῆναι.</td>
<td>καὶ γίνεται λαῖλαψ μεγάλη ἀνέμου καὶ τὰ κύματα ἑπέβαλλεν εἰς τὸ πλοῖον, ὡστε ἢδη γεμίζεσθαι τὸ πλοῖον.</td>
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(“and the Lord raised up a wind upon the sea, and there were great waves in the sea, and the boat was in danger of breaking apart”).

(“and there was a great gale of wind came of wind and the waves crashed into the boat so that the boat was already filled”).
The similarity in narrative order in these two verses is striking. Both texts report the rising of the storm, mention the waves, and then tell of the danger that the boat is in. Nonetheless, the only distinctive shared lexeme between the texts is πλοῖον ("boat"). The storms, the waves, and the danger are all described with different words and phrases.

Second, in both accounts the minor characters are depicted as fearful. Jonah 1.5 first reports the sailors’ fear with the verb ἐφοβήθησαν ("they were afraid"), which is then repeated again in 1.10 with the phrase καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν οἱ ἄνδρες φόβον μέγαν ("and the men were exceedingly afraid"). The second report of the sailors’ fear comes after Jonah tells the men he worships the Lord God (τὸν κύριον θεόν). Similarly, the disciples fear in Mark 4.41 after Jesus calms the storm and asks them why they are cowards and do not yet believe. The same phrase, “they were exceedingly afraid” (ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν) is used in both narratives. This is the most distinctive locution that the two pericopae have in common.

Third, in both Jonah and Mark, the main character is sleeping below deck as the storm rises:

Jonah 1.5
Ιωνας δὲ κατέβη εἰς τὴν κοίλην τοῦ πλοίου καὶ ἐκάθευδεν καὶ ἔρρεγχεν
("but Jonah lay in the hull of the ship, sleeping and snoring").

Mark 4.38
καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν ἐν τῇ πρόμινῃ ἐπὶ τὸ προσκεφάλαιον καθεύδων
("and he was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion").

Once more, the content is nearly identical, but there is only one distinctive shared word between the two texts, the imperfect verb ἐκάθευδεν ("he was sleeping" in Jonah and the participial form, καθεύδων ("sleeping"), in Mark.

Fourth and finally, the manner in which the sea is stilled is similar in both accounts. The captain of the ship approaches Jonah in 1.6, commanding him to rise up (ἀνάστα) and call
upon his God so that all aboard are not destroyed (μὴ ἀπολῶμεθα). Jonah then tells the sailors in 1.11–12 to pick him up and throw him into the sea, informing them that this will cause the storm to abate (κοπάσει ἡ θάλασσα ἀφ’ ὑμῶν). As soon as they do, the sea ceases from its surge (καὶ ἐστη ἡ θάλασσα ἐκ τοῦ σάλου αὐτῆς). In Mark 4.38, the disciples wake Jesus (ἐγείρουσιν αὐτὸν) and ask him if he is concerned that they are being destroyed (οὐ μέλει σοι ὅτι ἀπολλώμεθα). Jesus then rises up (διεγερθείς), rebukes the wind and sea, and, as a result, “the storm ceased and there was a great calm” (καὶ ἐκόπασεν ὁ ἄνεμος καὶ ἐγένετο γαλήνη μεγάλη).

Once more, the narrative order is similar and some of the central lexemes are related, but the intertextuality is inexact. Mark does not directly cite or quote Jonah, though there can be no doubt that the narrative is recalled.

To summarize: in both Joseph and Aseneth and Mark a tale from the Septuagint has been recalled and the protagonists outshine their Septuagintal counterparts. In Joseph and Aseneth, Benjamin and Levi do not repay Pharaoh’s son evil for evil, but attempt to facilitate his recovery. This is in direct contrast to David who swiftly cuts off Goliath’s head. In Mark, Jesus, like Jonah, sleeps in the hull of a boat. Instead of being flung overboard to still the storm, Jesus speaks to it, causing its rest. In both episodes from Joseph and Aseneth and Mark there can be little doubt that the Septuagintal narratives are recalled, but they are recalled echoically rather than by citation or with dense lexical overlap. Mark and Joseph and Aseneth exhibit similarity as to their mode of recalling intertexts.
MARK AND ASENETH IN ANCIENT MEDIA CULTURE

And so we move now from elucidating the similarities between these two narratives to explaining them. My contention is that the best explanation for the parallels between Mark and Aseneth is found by assessing the narratives’ place in ancient media culture. Specifically, by considering the modes in which the texts were produced.

As to intertextual imprecision, why might a narrative consistently recall texts without overt citations or verbatim reproduction? What might be the cause of Aseneth’s and Mark’s imprecision? There are a few possible answers, but I think the best one is that each author works from a mnemonic mode of textual recall. Neither is directly reproducing words written on scrolls that are laid out in front of him or her.\footnote{xlii}

Here, Jan Assmann’s work on cultural and communicative memory provides a theoretical entry point.\footnote{xliii} He expands the boundaries of what constitutes a text. As (post-)modern people conditioned by the fixity of texts that resulted from the invention of the printing press, we tend to think of texts as single, stable entities.\footnote{xliv} They are ink, formed into readable signs, printed on bound pages that can be reproduced over and over again with absolute accuracy. But Assmann, assessing the differences between ancient and modern memory and textuality, considers a text a “retrieved communication.”\footnote{xlvi} Written words themselves are not necessarily texts. Rather, writing is an externalization of memory, a memory aid, for the reactivation of, what Assmann calls, cultural texts.\footnote{xlvi} Cultural texts come in a variety of forms. Writings, oral storytelling traditions, rituals, and customs are but a few examples of cultural texts.
To apply Assmann’s conception of cultural textuality to Mark and Aseneth’s imprecise intertextuality, we can say that the story of David and Goliath and the story of Jonah are cultural texts that exist in different media for the authors of Aseneth and Mark, respectively. The written words themselves are not what constitute these cultural texts *en toto*. It is the entire tradition about David or Jonah, reactivated in a variety of ways, silent reading, public performance, storytelling, or individual and group memory, that is the cultural text. The text is not limited to words written on parchment. The words written on a scroll about David and Jonah are but one instantiation of their respective cultural text.\textsuperscript{xlvii}

Neither of our authors reproduce their target text from the Septuagint verbatim, because they are more interested in recalling the tradition—the cultural text—than the exact marks of ink, the letters made into words, that are written on the scroll (or better: scrolls). To be clear, I do think both authors were familiar with the written versions of these texts. But they have no concern for evoking them in a precise textual and literary manner. There was no eye contact with a scroll that contained the story of David and Goliath or Jonah when Aseneth and Mark were produced. And I think this is likely the case with all of the other intertexts recalled in Joseph and Aseneth and most of the intertexts recalled in the Gospel of Mark.

And this brings us to what I think is key to Mark and Aseneth’s similarities. Both work from mnemonic modes of textual recall because both narratives are products of the oral lifeworld.\textsuperscript{xlviii} They are oral literature textualized into the written medium. In the oral mode of communication and the aural medium of reception, textual precision is not as highly valued. This is because words on a page are not being visually compared with antecedent texts and traditions in the oral modality of communication. Visual comparison and the intertextual
precision that comes with it is a hallmark of the written, literary mode of communication. But these narratives read more like oral, sub-literary stories, and I think there imprecise intertextuality is one bit of evidence to this.

We need to be careful here, though. There has been a tendency in New Testament scholarship, and especially that on Mark’s Gospel, to wave this sort-of magic wand of orality over a narrative to explain its curious features. (That is: to say [better: write] something like, “these are residually oral features” and leave it at that with no explanation of how something oral made its way into a written text.) There has also been a tendency to think of orality and textuality as competing categories divided by a great gulf. As if, to intertextually evoke Rudyard Kipling, “Oh, orality is orality and textuality is textuality, and never the twain shall meet.” Recent research by John Miles Foley, Ruth Finnegan, Rafael Rodríguez, Alan Kirk, and others has shown that this infamous Great Divide approach to orality and textuality is not feasible for these modalities generally, or with respect to the New Testament in particular.

Instead, orality and textuality interact with one another in a variety of different ways that are specific to the media culture they exist within. I believe one of the tasks of the burgeoning method known as biblical media criticism in the coming years will be to name and explain the various ways in which orality and textuality interfaced in the Greco-Roman world.

As part of this endeavor, I propose that Joseph and Aseneth and the Gospel of Mark represent one instantiation of the complex interface between orality and textuality in the Greco-Roman world. They are of the same media form, and this is what best explains their similarities. I submit that both are textualized oral traditions. They existed as oral folktales—or oral traditions or cultural texts, whatever term we want to use—that were subsequently
textualized by dictation. They intentionally retain the syntax of their antecedent oral media form in their new, textual modality. Moreover, neither narrative was written *sua manu* (by hand) nor is the product of the scribal literati.

Composition by dictation was commonly employed by the literary elite to produce various kinds of discourse. But the practice was also ubiquitous amongst those who were not grapho-literate. A large majority of people in the Greco-Roman world did not have training in elementary writing, let alone compositional skills. Training in the composition of texts was the highest level of scribal education one could receive in this context, and it was even more rare in Jewish education than Greco-Roman education. But grapho-illiteracy did not prevent people from participating in a literate culture. (And it is worth noting that the Greco-Roman world was a literate culture.) One only needs to think of the thousands of instances of the phrase “I wrote for he or she who does not know letters” in the various papyri caches to be reminded that those who were not scribally literate could and did engage in the literate culture.

And this is how I believe Joseph and Aseneth and the Gospel of Mark were both composed: by a person who was not scribally literate dictating one instantiation of the oral tradition to someone who did have training in writing. This explains not only the narratives’ imprecise intertextualities, but also their paratactic structures addressed towards the beginning of this paper. Modern sociolinguistic research that directly compares oral tellings of a narrative to written versions of the same story has shown that the single most exemplary feature of oral narrative is the use of the idea unit. Idea units in oral narrative are typically four to seven words in length and are connected by parataxis or asyndeton. This maps well onto Mark and Aseneth, which have both been criticized as choppy and inelegant because they exhibit these
very linguistic features. Time permits me from addressing Aseneth’s and Mark’s other shared syntactical properties that are characteristic of oral narrative. Should there be questions about those, I’d be happy to field them during the Q&A time.

But in closing I want to direct attention to external evidence for composition by dictation of these narratives by a non-scribally-literate person. Along with the linguistic and intertextual evidence that I have highlighted, we also have historical witness to one of these texts being composed by dictation. I am referring to the ecclesiastical testimony that Mark served as Peter’s amanuensis in the production of the gospel. The details about how and when Mark “wrote up” Peter’s reminiscences change slightly in the different accounts of the gospel’s composition. But what is consistent in the testimonies is that two people were involved and that one of them was speaking a tradition. Whether or not this ecclesiastical testimony is accurate with respect to the historical figures involved, namely Mark and Peter, is neither here nor there (at least for the purposes of this paper). But it provides evidence that composition by dictation was a mode of producing texts in early Judaism and Christianity. This, along with the internal, linguistic evidence from the narratives that I’ve addressed here supports the claim that the textualized versions of the cultural texts we know as Mark and Joseph and Aseneth were oral narratives textualized via dictation. Thank you.

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consensus. However, WUNT 271 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1965), 145–146; infra.


Assuming that the short and long endings of Mark are secondary. This remains the scholarly consensus. However, Nicholas P. Lunn has recently made a case for the originality of the long ending (The


The lament extends from Joseph and Aseneth 12–14.


Elliott Maloney has done the minute work of counting the number of clauses that begin with “and” (καὶ) in Mark. He finds that 591 clauses in the gospel begin with the connective, though he does not offer a total number of clauses that are in Mark (*Semitic Interference*, 66).

The second most common conjunction in Mark is ὥς, occurring 163 times, followed by ἐπί at 102. All other conjunctions occur less than 100 times: γάρ (66), ἢν (64), ἀλλά (45), ἐν (36), εἰ (35), ὡς (22), ἐπεισόδιον (21), ἐπίνειον (15), ἦν (15), οὖσα (13), ἐπεισόδιον (12), ὡς (10), καθὼς (8), ὡς (6), μηδὲ (6), ὡς (twice as a conjunction; seventy-five times as a particle), οὖσα (2), ἐπεισόδιον (2), πρὶν (2), ἐπεί (1), ἦν (1).

In Matthew there are 1,194 instances of καὶ out of a total 18,363 words, or 1 in every 15.38 words. In Luke there are 1,483 instances of καὶ out of a total 19,495 words, or 1 in every 13.14.

In unique Matthean material there are 226 occurrences of καὶ out of 4,170 total words, or 1 in 18.45 words. And in unique Lukan material, there are 550 occurrences of καὶ of 7,060 words, or 1 in every 12.84. All unique Matthean and Lukan material is based on Brice C. Jones, *Matthean and Lukan Special Material: A Brief Introduction with Texts in Greek and English* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

Matthew removes Mark’s καὶ on 29 occasions: Matt 4.18 // Mark 1.16; Matt 19.9 // Mark 10.11; Matt 12.46 // Mark 3.310; Matt 13.1 // Mark 4.1; Matt 13.3 // Mark 4.30; Matt 13.34 // Mark 4.33; Matt 9.18 // Mark 5.21; Matt 14.1 // Mark 6.14; Matt 14.13 // Mark 6.31–32; Matt 18.6 // Mark 9.42; Matt 22.34 // Mark 12.28; Matt
The textual attestation to Joseph and Aseneth is complex. The pseudepigraphon exists in ninety-one different manuscripts across seven different languages (Standhartinger, “Recent Scholarship,” 354). These manuscripts have been categorized into four different text groups: a, b, c, d, which are named for their affinities with the four manuscripts, A, B, C, and D, that Pierre Battifol used in his 1889 editio princeps (“Le Livre,” 1–115). Paul Riessler translated Battifol’s edition into German (Altjüdisches Schriftum ausserhalb der Bibel [Augsburg: Filser, 1928], 497–538). Bernard Pick translated the same edition into English (“Joseph and Asenath,” Open Court 27 [1913]: 467–96), as did Ernest W. Brooks (Joseph and Asenath: The Confession of Asenath, Daughter of Pentephres the Priest [London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1918]). Since Battifol, the manuscripts have retained their capital letter designations. Lists and descriptions of the manuscripts are in Christoph Burchard, “Joseph and Asenath: A New Translation and Introduction,” in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 2 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 178. The debate about which text family is oldest has centered on groups b and d. In 1968, Marc Philonenko published the first critical edition of Joseph and Asenath relying on a manuscript from the shorter d text group (Philonenko, Joseph et Aséneth: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, et Notes, StPB 13 [Leiden: Brill, 1968]). He argued that this text family was the basis of the later-expanded b text group (ibid., 16–26). In contrast to Philonenko, Christoph Burchard has argued for the priority of the longer text group over the course of his career. This group was formerly family b, but was later expanded by Burchard and now includes family f, Syr, Arm, L2, and family a. Burchard argues for the priority of the longer versions in Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth: Überlieferung — Ortsbestimmung, WUNT 8 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1965); idem, Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth, SVTP 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1996); idem, ed., Joseph und Asenath, PVTG 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 41–46; idem, “The Text of Joseph and Asenath Reconsidered,” JSP 14 (2005): 83–96. Presently, both Burchard’s and Philonenko’s critical editions are employed as the base text for interpreters. I prefer and use Philonenko’s reconstruction based on the shorter d-text family in this paper.

In Philonenko’s reconstruction based on the earlier d-family witnesses, ἁζή appears 1 in every 7.96 words. In Battifol’s text, which is based on the later, more literary a-family, ἁζή occurs 1 in every 11.56 words (1,651/13,400).

For example, Battifol’s reconstruction of Joseph and Aseneth, which is based on the later, more literary MSS witnesses, uses δὲ 148 times compared to 10 occurrences of the word in Philonenko’s reconstruction, τότε 42 times to 2 in Philonenko, εἶτα 12 times to 0, σὺν 27 times to 1, γὰρ 14 times to 11, and λοιπόν 10 times to 4. Matthew uses δὲ 494 times to Mark’s 157 and τότε 90 times to Mark’s 6.

All translations of Joseph and Asenath are my own based on Philonenko’s Greek critical edition, Joseph et Aséneth.

Joseph and Aseneth 1.4, 9; 2.5–6; 4.8–9; 5.6; 10.11–13, 13–17; 14.15–16; 16.4–5, 9–11; 18.3–6; 24.16–
18; 27.3; 29.5–6 all contain six or more clauses connected by ἁζή consecutively. A few of these contain ten clauses connected in this manner, and 10.13–17 and 18.3–6 contain thirteen and twelve clauses connected with ἁζή in a single sentence, respectively.


All translations of Mark are my own based on the Greek text of NA-28.
Hays outlines the differences between allusions and echoes in his seminal monograph, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 29. He offers methodological considerations for detecting allusions and echoes in ibid., 29–33 and *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 34–45. In contrast to quotations, allusions and echoes do not possess verbatim repetition of words. If they do, the repetition is only of a few lexemes, often in different grammatical forms. Hays has recently addressed Mark’s intertextuality at length and concludes that “Mark’s way of drawing upon Scripture, like his narrative style more generally, is indirect and allusive” (*Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016], 98.)

In Joseph and Aseneth 15.3 the angel tells Aseneth that her name is written in the sky (καὶ αὐτὸς [λευ] ἑώρα γράμματα γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἀνεγίνωσκεν αὐτά ... τῇ Ἀσενέθ).


Patricia Ahearne-Kroll recognizes the allusion to 1 Samuel, but she does not note what kind of intertextual recall is being employed (“Joseph and Aseneth,” in *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*, ed. Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, vol. 3 [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2013], 2578).

Joseph and Aseneth 27.1; 1 Sam 17.33, 42 LXX.

Joseph and Aseneth 27.2; 1 Sam 17.42 LXX.

Joseph and Aseneth 27.4; 1 Sam 17.40 LXX.

Joseph and Aseneth 27.3: χρόταφον; 1 Sam 17.49 LXX: μέτωπον.

See note immediately above.

Joseph and Aseneth 27.3: ἡχόντισε; 1 Sam 17.49 LXX: ἐσφενδόνησεν.

Joseph and Aseneth 27.5: ἔδυσεν; 1 Sam 17.49 LXX: διέδυ.

Joseph and Aseneth 27.3: στρογγύλον; 1 Sam 17.40 LXX: λείος.

1 Samuel 17,51 LXX: καὶ ἔδραμεν δαώδ καὶ ἐπέστη ἐπὶ αὐτόν καὶ ἔλαβεν τὴν ῥομφαίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔβανάτωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀφεῖλεν τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ.

Joseph and Aseneth 29.2: καὶ ἔδραμεν ὑπ’ αὐτόν Βενιαμίν καὶ ἔλαβε τὴν ῥομφαίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔλυσεν αὐτὴν ἐκ τοῦ κολεοῦ, διότι Βενιαμίν οὐκ ἦν φορῶν ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ ῥομφαίαν.

Based on the resonances between Joseph and Aseneth 27–29 and 1 Samuel 17, Angela Standhartinger concludes that Joseph and Aseneth evokes 1 Samuel, but “promotes a different ethic” (“Humour in Joseph and
Aseneth,” *JSP* 24 [2015]: 254–55, quotation at 255). She determines that Joseph and Aseneth is parodying the Jewish legend from 1 Samuel (ibid., 258).

xxxvi 1 Samuel 17.51 LXX; Jos. Asen. 29.2.

xxxvii E.g.: Joseph and Aseneth 1.3 verbally resonates with Gen 41.49 LXX, and Docherty has suggested that this resonance grounds it in the biblical Joseph story, This parallel is one of the clearest between Joseph and Aseneth and the Septuagintal version of the Joseph cycle, but it is still inexact. Five lexemes overlap between the texts. These are all in the phrase στὸν ὡς(ε)ι τὴν ἄμμον τῆς βαλάσσης. Beyond this, the overlap is not verbatim. Similarly, Joseph and Aseneth 4.9 echoes an element of Joseph’s character from the Genesis narrative. Pentephres tells Aseneth, “the spirit of God is upon [Joseph]” (πνεύμα θεοῦ ἐστιν ὑπ’ αὐτῷ). Contrary to Docherty’s claim that the statement “is taken straight from Pharaoh’s similar recognition in Genesis 41:38” (“Joseph and Aseneth,” 34), the parallel is not a verbatim citation from Genesis. Rather, it is an ideological echo registered by the catchphrase πνεύμα θεοῦ. Genesis 41:38 LXX uses the phrase when Pharaoh asks his servants if they will find another man like Joseph “who has the spirit of God in him” (δὲ ἔχει πνεύμα θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ). The differences are obvious. First, in Genesis, the subject of the verb is Joseph while it is the spirit of God in Joseph and Aseneth. Second, the texts use different prepositions, ὑπ’ in Joseph and Aseneth and ἐν in Genesis. And third, Joseph and Aseneth makes its claim about Joseph with a finite clause, while Genesis uses a relative clause.

xxxviii Nominal forms of γραφή appear in Mark 12.10, 24; 14.49. And verbal forms of γράφω occur in Mark 1.2; 7.6; 9.12; 10.4; 11.17; 12.19; 14.21; and 14.27, usually in the perfect tense form, γέγραπται.


x It is also likely, as Mark L. Strauss argues, that a number of Psalms that extol YHWH’s power over the sea, such as Ps 18.15; 104.7; 106.9; 107.23–29, intertextually inform the Markan pericope as well (*Mark, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014], 208).

xi Interestingly, both Matthew and Luke redact the verbal phrase ἐφόβηθησαν φόβον μέγαν. Matthew 8.27 substitutes ἐφόβηθησαν with ἠθάναταν. Luke 8.25 alters the indicative form of φοβέω to the participle, φοβηθέντες, which appears alongside the indicative form ἠθάναταν. A nearly identical phrase, ἐφοβηθή φόβον μέγαν, occurs in Jos Asen 6.1. Only the number of the verb has been changed.

xii *Contra* Burton L. Mack, who offers the following anachronistic image of the production of Mark: “[Mark’s Gospel] was composed at a desk in a scholar’s study lined with texts and open to discourse with other intellectuals. In Mark’s study were chains of miracle stories, collections of pronouncement stories in various states of elaboration, some form of Q, memos on parables and proof texts, the scriptures, including the prophets, written materials from the Christ cult, and other literature representative of Hellenistic Judaism. It would not be unthinkable that Mark had a copy of the Wisdom of Solomon, or some of the Maccabean literature, or some Samaritan texts, and so on” (*A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988], 322–23.)


xvii Assmann writes, “the text is the sum of its variations, it is in flux” (“Cultural Texts,” 108).


xix As Alan Kirk notes, “It is the written medium, with its visual, material properties, that makes variation evident” (*Q in Matthew: Ancient Media, Memory, and Early Scribal Transmission of the Jesus Tradition*, LNTS 564 [London: Bloomsbury, 2016], 6). In this respect, it is of interest that Matthew and Luke consistently find Mark’s imprecise intertextuality problematic and make it conform to the wording of the Septuagint.


2 Kirk offers an extended prolegomena on orality, writing, and the complexity of media interfaces in the ancient world (*Q in Matthew*, 1–28).

The phrase ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ ἀγραμμάτου (“I wrote for he who is illiterate”) and its near equivalents, ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ μὴ εἰδότος γράμματα (“I wrote for he who does not know letters”) and ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ βραδέως γράφοντος (“I wrote for he who writes slowly”), are ubiquitous in the non-literary papyri. They show that grapho-illiteracy did not impede people from “writing” in Greco-Roman antiquity. Thomas J. Kraus’s creates a representative list of texts for each formula (“I wrote for he who is illiterate”) from Oxyrhynchus (Ancient Compositional Practices and the Synoptic Problem, BETL 186 [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005], 23 n 16.


The testimony is contained in a number of sources. It begins with Papias as quoted in Eusebius, HE 3.39.15. It continues in Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 3.1.1, and the prologue of Hippolytus, the text and English of translation of which is in C. Clifton Black, Mark: Images of an Apostolic Interpreter (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994,) 119. It’s also attested twice by Clement in Eusebius (HE 2.15.1–12; 6.14.6–7) and the adumbraiones on 1 Peter 5.13, available only in a sixth-century translation by Cassiodorus (Black, Mark, 138–39). Origen accepts the tradition of Mark as Peter’s amanuensis in De Vir. 8 and Comm. On Matt. Pref. And Jerome explicitly writes that the gospel was composed by oral narration and transcription: “the blessed Peter had Mark, whose Gospel was composed by Peter’s dictation and [Mark’s] transcription” (cuius evangelium Petro narrante et illo scribente compositum est). This text and translation is from Black, Mark, 167. For the Latin and French translation, see Saint Jérôme: Lettres, ed. Jérôme Labourt, Collections des Universités de France (Paris: Société d’Edition, 1958), 6:156.