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GA 304, Theophylact's Commentary and the Ending of Mark

MINA MONIER

This article provides a fresh evaluation of evidence on manuscript GA 304 (Paris, BnF, Grec 94). This manuscript is often quoted in critical editions of the New Testament as one of the three main Greek witnesses to the short ending of Mark. As part of the MARK16 project, the author provides a close examination of the manuscript's content, with a focus on Mark 16. Afterwards, a closer look into the possible literary connection between GA 304 and the Gospels commentary of Theophylact will be made in order to understand the background of Mark's short ending in this manuscript. Against recent assessments that downplayed its significance in the debates of Mark's ending, this article argues that GA 304 stands as a good case for the author's preference of the short ending, which must have been based on an authoritative source that shaped his decision. The manuscript's complex relationship to Theophylact's commentary shows how it should not be presumed that the former is posterior to the latter, and therefore it does not owe its ending to a redactional act of Theophylact's catena. Therefore, this article opens the door for further literary examination of GA 304 against the wider pool of the tradition of Greek catenae.¹

Keywords: New Testament, Gospel of Mark, Short Ending, Catena, Theophylact, GA 304.

Introduction

The problem of Mark's ending has been investigated through literary, stylistic, theological and textual methods which produced a plethora of hypotheses.² However, this article is only concerned with one thing: textual evidence.³ Alongside codices Sinaiticus (Σ) and Vaticanus (B), GA 304 is another surviving Greek witness to the short ending. This fact gives GA 304 weight in the assessment of Mark's ending. While there is an abundance of literature on the first two, what is written about the third is little in comparison.

¹ The author wishes to thank the editors and reviewers of *Filologia Neotestamentaria*, Professors J. K. Elliot, Hugh Houghton and Dr. Claire Clivaz for their constructive comments.

In New Testament critical editions, NA²⁶⁻²⁸ and UBS⁴ place 304 after **Σ** and **B** in their list of manuscripts omitting Mark 16:9-20, while, for example, the Benoit-Boismard *Synopse* drops it.⁴ This is also the case with scholars who either used or omitted 304 while weighing their options regarding the long ending.⁵ The manuscript described by Daniel Wallace as an “unremarkable twelfth-century Byzantine MS”⁶ was considered by Kurt Aland as evidence of how the short ending “persisted stubbornly” as late as the twelfth century, despite its suppression by church tradition.⁷ The routine references to it in standard books and commentaries neglect the nature of the manuscript, with no clear evidence on the authors’ examination of the manuscript itself.⁸ Inspecting the microfilm

² For a selection of recent studies that used different methods, see Elizabeth E. Shively, “Recognizing Penguins: Audience Expectation, Cognitive Genre Theory, and the Ending of Mark’s Gospel.” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 80.2 (2018): 273-292; R. Morgan, “How did Mark End his Narrative?” *The Expository Times* 128.9 (2017): 417-426; J. K. Elliott, “The Text and Language of the Endings to Mark’s Gospel,” in J. K. Elliott (ed.), *The Language and Style of the Gospel of Mark*. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 203-211; Travis B. Williams, “Bringing Method to the Madness: examining the Style of the longer ending of Mark.” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* (2010): 397-417; C. Clivaz, “Returning to Mark 16,8 : What’s New?” *EThL* 4 (2019): forthcoming.

³ For bibliography on textual evidence see D. C. Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 341-2. B. Ehrman and B. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 322-7.

⁴ P. Benoit, M.-E. Boismard (eds.), *Synopse des Quatre Évangiles* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1965), 342. Tyndale House (ed.), *The Greek New Testament* (Crossway, 2017), 41. The recently published Tyndale House Greek New Testament drop the reference to 304. However, it must be maintained that this edition focused on the manuscripts from the first six centuries only due to time limitation.

⁵ K. Aland, *Bemerkungen zum Schluss des Markusevangeliums*, in *Neotestamentica et Semitica* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969), 165; William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (William Eerdmans, 1974), 601; Josef Ernst, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1981), 497; James A. Kelhoffer, “The Witness of Eusebius’ ad Marinum and Other Christian Writings to Text-Critical Debates concerning the Original Conclusion to Mark’s Gospel,” *ZNW* 92.1-2 (2001): 98; Parker, *Introduction*, 341. In his *Textual Commentary*, Metzger mentions GA 304 along with GA 2386 in a footnote. He comments on GA 2386 as not fit for witnessing to the short ending. Yet, he makes no comment on 2386 304. See, B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies), 120, n.1. See also J. K. Elliot, “The Last Twelve Verses of Mark: Original or Not?”, in D.A. Black (ed.), *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark*, 4 Views (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2008), 80-102, 82.

⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, “Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel,” in D. Black (ed.), *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: 4 Views* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2008), 19.

⁷ K. Aland, and B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 292.

⁸ High resolution images of Mark 16 folia could be accessed at: <Mark16.sib.swiss>..

of the manuscript,⁹ Maurice Robinson echoed John Burgon's remarks¹⁰ by emphasising the necessity of taking into consideration the nature of 304 as a commentary while evaluating textual evidence.¹¹ Whether or not Robinson's recommendation to dismiss GA 304 as evidence of the short ending is correct, it comes in a brief footnote that does not do justice to the size of the manuscript and its presence in one of the most complicated issues in the New Testament.

Therefore, in deciding whether or not to add it to the body of evidence in NT critical editions and subsequent secondary literature, a careful assessment of Mark 16 in the context of this manuscript and within its family of Greek commentaries must be maintained before establishing a learned decision on the matter. As part of the SNSF MARK 16 project,¹² hosted by the Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics in Lausanne, the author offers the results of his study on the available data that could be drawn from the high-resolution images the project has acquired on Mark's ending within GA 304.¹³

GA 304

GA 304 is a commentary on the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. In the Seventeenth century, Petrus Possinus edited it under the heading of "the Anonymous commentary from Toulouse," when it was owned by the Archbishop of Toulouse Charles de Montchal.¹⁴ A note to this effect by Caspar René Gregory is affixed to the front endpaper of the manuscript, which is now located in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) under shelf mark 'Grec 194.'¹⁵ It is not clear whether the codex is complete

⁹ Maurice Robinson, *The Long Ending of Mark as Canonical Verity*, in Black, *Perspectives*, 77 n.129.

¹⁰ J. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel according to S. Mark* (Oxford and London: James Parker and Co., 1871), 283.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Online page: <<http://p3.snf.ch/project-179755>>.

¹³ See n. 6 above.

¹⁴ See P. Possinus, *Catena Graecorum patrum in Evangelium secundum Marcum* (Rome, Bibliotheca Barberina, 1673). John Burgon did not recognise it. John W. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel according to St Mark* (Oxford: James Parker, 1871), 283. Information from the CATENA project at the University of Birmingham identifies the Matthew catena as CPG 114, and Mark as CPG 126.5. For a checklist of the Greek New Testament Catena Manuscripts produced by that project, visit: <http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/3086/?_ga=2.144756733.892819402.1557742578-969910547.1557742578>.

¹⁵ The full codex is available online on the website of the BNF: <[https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10722123f.r=Grec%20194?rk=21459;2](https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10722123f.r=Grec%20194?rk=21459;2>)>

or whether there Luke and John should also be present. Further physical examination would be required to answer this question. Microfilm images also show dark stains that reflect apparent damage. This damage affects the legibility of the text. Based on palaeographical evidence, the manuscript is dated to the twelfth century AD.¹⁶ The work is in the form of an alternating catena¹⁷ with biblical lemmata distinguished from the commentary with a short space in the same line. Abbreviations of the quoted church fathers appear in the margins. In Matthew, the distinction between the biblical text and its patristic commentary is more obvious, with a larger letter at the beginning of each text and comment, and the patristic abbreviation. However, the text in Mark does not always preserve these features, and sometimes the copyist reduces the space that distinguishes a lemma from a comment to an extent that the distinction is harder to make.

A careful examination of the text of GA 304 shows that the catena is closely related to Theophylact of Ohrid's commentary.¹⁸ Both share the same Byzantine text, with some minor differences between them.¹⁹ However, these similarities are not present in terms of the commentary. The part of GA 304 on Matthew heavily uses John Chrysostom. However, the author uses patristic quotations in Matthew far more than he does in the part on Mark. The complex relationship between the two catenae appears in these comments. We can observe varying degrees of textual agreements in the comments, from simple key words to several sentences. However, there is no full agreement in a complete section.²⁰

Two general observations on the relationship between the two catenae could be made. First, both share the same concepts, agreeing on what should be said. They each place emphases on different themes but still share the same opinions in the corresponding comments. Second, 304 is shorter than Theophylact. The key points raised by the compiler of

¹⁶ K. Aland, and B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 292

¹⁷ On the form alternating catena, see H. Houghton and D. C. Parker, An Introduction to Greek New Testament Commentaries with a Preliminary Checklist of New Testament Manuscripts, in H. Houghton (ed.), *Commentaries, Catenaes and Biblical Tradition* (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2016), 10.

¹⁸ A critical edition of the commentary is published in J. P. Migne's PG 123.

¹⁹ For example, Mark 4:4 in GA 304 preserves the Byzantine reading of τὰ πετεινὰ (the birds) while Theophylact has: τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. On the other hand, Theophylact has the Byzantine reading ἀλείψωσιν αὐτόν, while GA 304 has ἀλείψωσι τὸν ἰησοῦν.

²⁰ A good example to explain the different degrees of agreement is found in Mark 8:27-39, which both catenae divide into four sections. A relatively high degree of textual agreement could be found in the first section (verses 27-30), while there are a number of contrasts in the next section (31-33). In the third section there is moderate agreement on different key words (34-37), and the last section (38-39) is fairly close to the language of Theophylact's comment.

304 are longer and are made more elaborately in Theophylact. The latter sometimes adds other materials that are not found in 304. This is also the case in the prefaces and introductions found only in Theophylact's catena. These observations are fundamental for understanding the case of Mark 16 between the two texts.

Mark 16 in GA 304

Text

The ending of Mark 16 bears a fundamental difference between GA 304 and Theophylact. However, it is important to refer to the examination of the manuscript made by Robinson, upon which he built his valuation of it in the problem of Mark's ending. In a statement originally made on the internet, which has recently appeared elsewhere in printed books, Robinson says:

“1- The primary matter [in 304] is the commentary. The gospel text is merely interspersed between the blocks of commentary material, and should not be considered the same as a ‘normal’ continuous-text MS.

2- Also, it is often very difficult to discern the text in contrast to the comments.... Following γὰρ at the close of 16:8, the MS has a mark like a filled-in ‘o,’ followed by many pages of commentary, all of which summarize the endings of the other gospels and even quote portions of them.

3- Following this, the commentary then begins to summarize the ἔτερον δὲ παρὰ τοῦ Μαρκοῦ, presumably to cover the non-duplicated portions germane to that gospel in contrast to the others.

4- There remain quotes and references to the other gospels regarding Mary Magdalene, Peter, Galilee, the fear of the women, etc. But at this point the commentary abruptly ends, without completing the remainder of the narrative or the parallels. I suspect that the commentary (which contains only Mt and Mk) originally continued the discussion and that a final page or pages at the end of this volume likely were lost. I would suggest that GA 304 should not be claimed as a witness to the shortest ending.”²¹

Robinson's remarks explain his judgement regarding that codex. But an examination of the manuscript itself shows that most of these remarks

²¹ Quoted by Nicholas P. Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark: A New Case for the Authenticity of Mark 16:9-20* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2015), 34. It is also found in D. W. Hester, *Does Mark 16:9-20 Belong in the New Testament?* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 88-9. Both works found it on an internet page identified as the Encyclopaedia of the New Testament Textual Criticism: <<http://www.skypoint.com/members/waltzmn/>>. Since this is not a verifiable source, the author approached Professor Robinson on this matter. While he did not provide a written source for the quote, he kindly confirmed its accuracy in the light of his examination of the microfilm (personal correspondence – 5/4/2019).

need to be re-examined. Indeed, the biblical text is “merely interspersed” between blocks of commentary material. However, this alternating catena has the Gospels fully quoted in order. Therefore, the absence of the long ending cannot simply be justified by the genre of the work. The second point is not less problematic. While the copyist’s writing quality varies in the codex, it is clear in the case of Mark 16 where the text ends and where the commentary begins. GA 304 and Theophylact both quote an entire block of Mark 16:1-8, starting with a large “κ” for καί. Without interweaving with any comments, the text concludes with a clear dot after γάρ. It is not obvious if Robinson meant by “o” the black dot that follows γάρ or the omicron after it, which is written in a large format and a different colour. However, in both cases there is nothing that suggests anything unusual in the conclusion of the biblical lemma and the beginning of the comment. The same bold dot is used, with the same space from the last word, to conclude all the lemmata. As for the omicron, it is the first letter of the first word in the commentary: “Οὐ μέγα τί οὐδέ ἄξιον ...”²² It is the same sentence Theophylact starts his comment with.

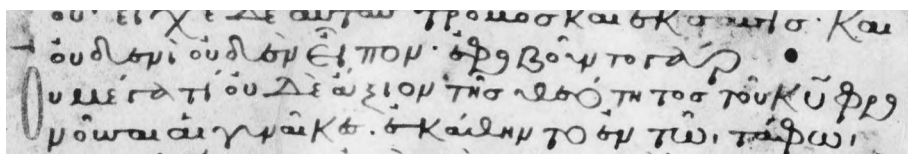


Figure 1: The end of Mark 16:8 and the beginning of the commentary.

The digitised microfilm made available by the BNF does not show “many pages of commentary” after Mark 16:8. The lemma is written on the verso of the penultimate page and the commentary continues onto the final recto, which closes with a colophon. The final verso was originally blank but now bears marks of ownership and *probationes pennaе*. The copyist signals the end of the commentary with a classic epigram that says: “As the travellers rejoice upon reaching their homeland, likewise the scribe is upon the end of this book.”²³ This epigram declares the end of the

²² The author has offered the complete transcription and translation to be accessed at: <https://mark16.sib.swiss/>.

²³ Ὅσπερ ξένοι χαίρουσι ιδεῖν πατρίδα, οὕτω καὶ ὁ γράφωντος βιβλίου τέλο[ς].” A database of the occurrences of this epigram, as well as its different forms, can be found here online: <http://www.dbbe.ugent.be/type/view/id/201/>. See also, H. Omont, “Le dernier des copistes grecs en Italie, Jean de Sainte-Maure (1572-1612),” *Revue des Études Grecques* 1-2 (1888): 177-191. Most recently, see Julie Boeten and Sien de Groot, “Byzantine Book Epigrams: The case of ὅσπερ ξένοι,” Paper given at the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, August 2016. Available online:

https://www.academia.edu/28278993/Byzantine_Book_Epigrams_The_case_of_%E1%BD%A5%CF%83%CF%80%CE%B5%CF%81_%CE%BE%CE%AD%CE%BD%CE%BF%CE%B9

Gospel of Mark's commentary at this point. Interestingly, a closer look into the epigram in the manuscript shows an attempt to erase it,²⁴ and then we can see that there was another attempt to rewrite the epigram as the first three words appear ὥσπερ ξένοι χαίρουσι [...]. This possibly reflects conflicting views of later owners or readers of the manuscript regarding the ending of Mark.

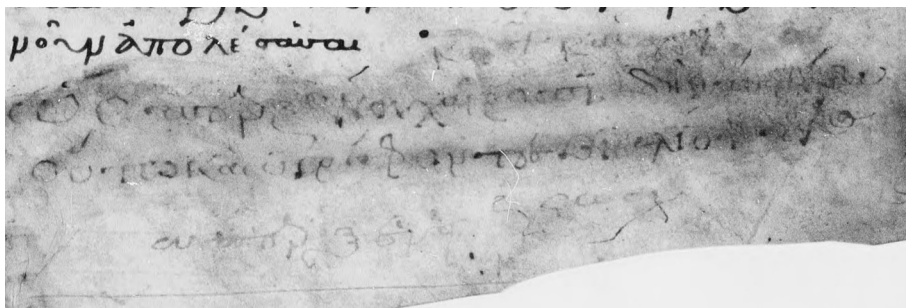


Figure 2: Epigram at the end of the catena on Mark.

In comparison with the end of Matthew's part of the manuscript, we can observe similarities and differences. The compiler concludes Matthew's commentary with the following remark: "This is the end of the exegesis on the first Gospel of the Son, to whom all glory and power along with the preeminent Father and all-holy Spirit forever, unto the ages of ages. Amen + + +." A similar ending is not found in Mark. However, the compiler, or a later copyist, finishes the section of Matthew with the same epigram, although in a longer form.²⁵ Unfortunately, it is not entirely legible, but the first sentence reads similarly to Mark's epigram: ὥσπερ ξένοι χαίρουσι...

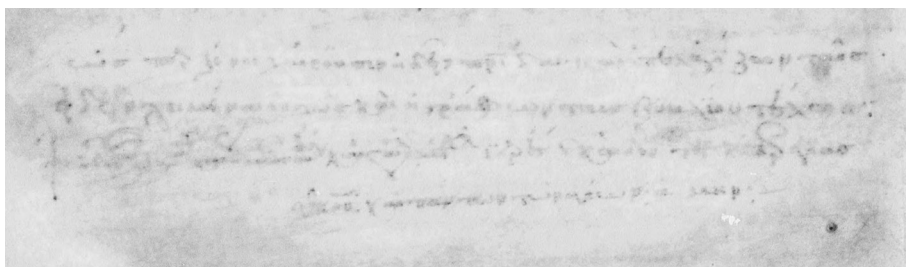


Figure 3: Epigram at the end of Matthew.

²⁴ The author wishes to thank Claire Clivaz for this observation. Cf. Claire Clivaz, *L'ange et la sueur de sang* (Lc 22,43-44). *Où comment on pourrait bien encore écrire l'histoire* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 253-5.

²⁵ On the different forms see n.18 above.

The verso of the last folio of the manuscript shows no evidence to suggest that there is anything missing from the Markan part of the work. It has a eulogy to the “great martyrs,” written twice (one at the top and once at the bottom of the page), and what seems to be a dedication, all written in poor Greek with grammatical mistakes and handwriting that is difficult to read.²⁶

Commentary

In his comparison with the other Gospels, the compiler did not include material referring to the existence (or lack) of the appearances in Mark. The exegesis simply stops where the text ends (Mark 16:8). By comparison with the parallel section in Matthew, we note that the compiler has the same exegetical style; commenting on the differences between the accounts of Matthew and the other three canonical Gospels, then dealing with specific questions. While the comparisons with Luke and John continue until the end, references to Mark stop at Matthew 28:7-8, which is the parallel verse to Mark 16:8. The lack of any reference to the Markan account beyond verse 8 should not be seen coincidental.

Comparing the commentary of GA 304 with that of Theophylact on Mark 16 reflects the complexity of the relationship between the two texts. There is no consistent pattern nor identical passage (or even a long sentence) between them to suggest a linear literary relationship. A presumption of literary dependence on Theophylact’s catena cannot explain what we have in the text. As in the rest of the work, we have a similar exegetical analysis of the biblical text: they both divide the biblical passage into similar themes, and they show similar concerns to interpret. However, when we look into a literary relationship, we are left with common words in different orders, making a literary relationship difficult to identify. Both texts extract parts of the verses to comment on. If we do not count these biblical parts from the common material between the two comments, the percentage of shared wording falls significantly. Like most of the cases in earlier chapters, particularly in Mark, we are left with a small number of scattered words and common clusters which make no sense if the special materials are removed. This cannot be explained by suggesting literary dependence of 304 on Theophylact’s commentary. What we can see in Theophylact’s treatment of the same theme is more elaborate on the com-

²⁶ The author would like to express his gratitude to Mr. Dimitrios Kalomirakis of the Greek Ministry of Culture, and Rev. Theophilus, the Hieromonk of the Pantocrator monastery in Mount Athos, for their help to decipher this page.

mon clusters.²⁷ For example, on the question of why the angel specifically named Peter in Mark 16:7, both GA 304 and Theophylact have the same explanation but Theophylact's is more comprehensive about how the angel's act intended to restore Peter (after his denial of Jesus).

304	Theophylact
<p>Τίνος οὖν ἐνεκεν τόν πέτρον ἀπό τῶν ἄλλῶν μαθητῶν ἐχώρισαν. ἢ ὡς ἐξαιρετόν καί κορυφαῖον τῶν ἄλλῶν. ἢ ὡς ἀρνησάμενον καί ἐπ' αἰσχυνόμενον τῷ σοῦ προσελθεῖν. ὡς ἀποβεβλημένον ἴσως, ὁ δὲ καί ἀληθέστερον ἐστίν, ἵνα μὴ σκανδαλισθῇ ὁ πέτρος.</p>	<p>τόν πέτρον χωρίζει ἀπό τῶν μαθητῶν, ὡς κορυφαῖον κατ' ἐξοχίαν αὐτόν ὀνομάζων ἐκτός ἐκείνων. ἢ ἐπεὶ ἠρνήσατε ὁ Πέτρος, ἐάν ἤλθόν καί εἶπον αἱ γυναῖκες, ὅτι Προσετάγημεν εἰπεῖν τοῖς μαθηταῖς, εἶπεν ἄν ὁ Πέτρος. Ἐγὼ ἠρνησάμην. Λοιπὸν μαθητῆς αὐτοῦ οὐκ εἰμί. ἀπέβαλεν οὖν ἐμέ, ἐβδελύξατο με. Τοῦτου οὖν ἐνεκεν προστιθησι το, καί τῷ Πέτρῳ, ἵνα μὴ σκανδαλισθῇ ὁ πέτρος, ὡς αὐτός μὴ λόγου ἀξιωθείς, οἷα ἀρνησάμενος, καί διὰ τοῦτο μηδέ συντάττεσθαι τοι, μαθηταῖς ἀξιός ὢν.</p>

The key point is the same, represented by the key words κορυφαῖον, ἀρνησάμενον and the essential cluster ἵνα μὴ σκανδαλισθῇ ὁ πέτρος. Theophylact unpacks his explanation around these clusters.

Another sample can illustrate the complexity of the literary relationship between the two commentaries.²⁸ Why were the women and the disciples commissioned to go to Galilee, and what was it that the women were afraid of?

304	Theophylact
<p>πέμπει δέ αὐτούς εἰς τὴν γαλιλαίαν τοῦ θορυβίου τῶν ἰουδαίων καί τῆς ταραχῆς ἀπαλλάττων. Αἱ δέ γυναῖκες ἐκστασαί τοῦ λογισμοῦ, καί φόβῳ συσχεῖσθαι. ἐπὶ τέ τῃ ὁράσει τοῦ ἀγγέλου, καί τῃ ὁράσει τῆς ἀναστάσεως, οὐδενὶ οὐδέν εἶπον. Ἡ τοῖς ἰουδαίοις φοβούμεναι. Ἡ ὑπὸ τοῦ φόβου τὸν νοῦν ἀπολέσασθαι.</p>	<p>εἰς τὴν γαλιλαίαν πέμπει δέ αὐτούς, τῶν θορυβίων καί τοῦ πολλοῦ φόβου ὑπεξάγω τῶν ἰουδαίων. Ἐχρητασε μεντοι τας γυναικας φοβος και εκστασις, τουτεστιν, εκπληξις, επι τε τη θεα του ἀγγέλου, και ἐπὶ τῷ φοβῷ τῆς ἀναστάσεως, καί διὰ τοῦτο οὐδενὶ οὐδέν εἶπον. ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ, ἢ τοῖς ἰουδαίοις ἐφοβοῦντο, ἢ τῷ φόβῳ συνεχόμεναι τῷ ἄπο τῆς ὀπτασίας, καί τὸν νοῦν ἀπολέσασθαι. Καί διὰ τοῦτο οὐδενὶ οὐδέν εἶπον, ἐπιλαθόμενοι καί ὢν ἤκουσαν.</p>

The same answer is found in both: they were sent to Galilee to avoid the anger of the Jews. Why were they afraid? According to GA 304, it is because of seeing the angel and the resurrection. But the women did not

²⁷ For example, the difference in the Gospels' account of the angel's location, the identity of the women, or why Peter's name is mentioned in the angel's instruction to the woman.

²⁸ I also chose this sample from Mark 16 due to the relevance of the topic.

see the resurrection. While GA 304 uses “the sight (τη ὁράσει),” twice Theophylact uses a more accurate pair: the sight (θέα) of the angel, and the horror or shuddering (φρικώδη) of the resurrection. The key terms they share are θορύβου τῶν ἰουδαίων and τόν νοῦν ἀπολέσασαι. Otherwise, the rest is shared with the biblical text itself, like οὐδενί οὐδέν εἶπον, ἔκστασις and φόβω. Again, we observe that Theophylact’s text is more precise and detailed. These are samples of what we find in comparing the two catenae.

The Ending of Mark in GA 304 and Theophylact

This brings us back to the problem of Mark’s ending between Theophylact and GA 304. Did the author of 304 follow Theophylact? Theophylact’s catena continues to cover the long ending smoothly. It might be interesting to see how Theophylact chose to take the unusually large block of Mark 16:1-8 to be interpreted as a single unit, before dividing the rest (the long ending) into two smaller portions (vv 9-13, then 14-20). However, we cannot see any disruption in the transition to the longer ending. Perhaps there is one famous exception in codex 26 (GA 888),²⁹ which preserves an interesting note towards the end of the comment on the short ending: “Some of the exegetes say that this [*the short ending*] is the fulfilment of the Gospel according to Mark, and that the following words became later. It is necessary, then, to interpret this [*the longer ending*] in order to maintain the truth unharmed.”³⁰ However, this note does not appear in the other surviving manuscripts of the catena. Further, James Kelhoffer rightly observes how the note’s wording is very close to one made by the contemporaneous Greek writer Euthymius Zigabenus.³¹ The copyist of codex 26 may have simply added this note as a matter of integrity. Therefore, it is more likely to be an addition by the compiler rather than being part of Theophylact’s original text. Therefore, GA 304 and Theophylact’s catena disagree on the ending of Mark.

²⁹ This copy of Theophylact’s catena is part of a larger volume preserved in the Marciana National Library of Venice under shelf mark Codex 26. After checking the manuscript’s images, the author has established that it is in fact GA 888.

³⁰ This note appears in folio 231v. The transcription of the note is also found in Migne’s edition (PG 123:677, n.90). It reads: “φάσι τίνες τῶν ἐξηγητῶν ἐνταῦθα συμπληροῦσαι τὸ κατὰ Μαρκὸν Εὐαγγέλιον, τα δὲ ἐφεξῆς προσθήκην εἶναι μεταγενεστέραν. χρῆ δὲ καὶ ταύτην ἐρμηνεύσαι μηδὲν τῆ ἀληθείᾳ λυμαιομένους.”

³¹ James A. Kelhoffer, *Conceptions of “Gospel” and Legitimacy in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 158. The Greek text of Euthymius’ note appears in his commentary on Mark.PG 129:845, which reads: “φασι δε τίνες τῶν ἐξηγητῶν ἐνταῦθα συμπληροῦσθαι τὸ κατὰ Μαρκὸν Εὐαγγέλιον. δὲ ἐφεξῆς προσθήκην εἶναι μεταγενεστέραν. χρῆ δὲ καὶ ταύτην ἐρμηνεύσαι μηδὲν τῆ ἀληθείᾳ λυμαιομένην.”

So, we are left with three possible scenarios to re-examine in the light of our observations on the commentary and text:

- 1.- GA 304 is indeed based on Theophylact's catena.
- 2.- Theophylact's catena is based on GA 304.
- 3.- Both are based on an earlier commentary.

The first possibility could be supported by the fact that GA 304 follows the same structure of Theophylact's catena. But this fact could also reverse that literary relationship. Therefore, this observation is not enough to maintain Theophylact's priority. Besides, it is difficult to understand the fragmentary common materials within the comments, as we noted. GA 304 is not, for instance, summarising Theophylact's catena. If GA 304 stopped following Theophylact after Mark 16:8, and omitted the last 12 verses, this would have been an odd action that cannot be explained in light of its unwavering loyalty to the structure of Theophylact's Gospels text throughout the catena. While the second and third possibilities cannot be maintained with any certainty either, they are more probable if we see that Theophylact may have expanded the commentary³² to include the introductions and prefaces, elaborated on the comments, and added the longer ending as well as the Gospels of Luke and John. In light of this, the least likely, yet not impossible, case is that the scribe of 304 decided to voluntarily remove the long ending while copying Theophylact. It is more plausible to see that GA 304 preserves an antegraph that has the short ending. But it is difficult to imagine that the copyist of GA 304 decided to cut off the commentary at Mark 16:8. This remains hypothetical. Another no less speculative suggestion is that the antegraph lost a few pages exactly at the end of the commentary on Mark 16:1-8 before it was accessed by the copyist of GA 304. This finds no support from the comment that ends perfectly, covering Mark 16:1-8, concluding with no abrupt or open-ended statements and leaving an empty half page space with an epigram. A comparison with cases such as Mark's ending in Vaticanus Arabicus 13 or GA 2386,³³ where lost pages can indeed be suggested, illustrates the difference. We must also remember that even the copyist of GA 888 thought that this is the proper ending of Theophylact's catena.

³² While the manuscript of GA 304 is later than Theophylact in date, the commentary itself could potentially be earlier.

³³ A digitised copy can be accessed here: https://tarsian.vital-it.ch/index.html#folio_103r. See Sara Schulthess, "Vaticanus Arabicus 13: What Do We Really Know? With an Additional Note on the Ending of Mark," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 70.1-2 (2018): 63-84. DOI: <10.2143/JECS.70.1.3284666>. On GA 2386 see J. K. Elliot, "The Last Twelve Verses," 82.

Conclusion

In this article, I offered a fresh examination of Mark 16 in GA 304. In light of this examination, I discussed the remarks and comments related to the significance of the text for the debate on Mark's ending, and particularly those made by Maurice Robinson. My examination of the text and commentary suggests that GA 304's short ending is not due to any damage or any missing pages. Neither is it because the text is a commentary in which the author selects, and deselects, the verses he wants to comment on. The texts of Matthew and Mark are entirely quoted and the part of Mark ends at 16:8 with a clear concluding epigram.

The next question was identifying the text. GA 304 appears to have a complex literary relationship with Theophylact's commentary. On the one hand, both share the same structure and they share the same ideas in their interpretation. However, the two texts vary considerably in the amount of shared material in their commentary. In general, they share clusters of words and short sentences within the comment, but in different orders and with different materials as well. The work of Theophylact is generally longer and more elaborate in its details, while GA 304 is simpler and shorter. Therefore, it would be imprudent to assume Theophylact's priority, or GA 304's direct literary dependence on Theophylact, as the best explanation.

This leads us to the question of Mark 16's ending. While all possibilities of the literary relationship between the two commentaries are open, it is unlikely that Theophylact's commentary at Mark 16:8 was cut from GA 304. It is plausible that GA 304 reflects the knowledge of an antigraph that had the short ending. The compiler knew of the long ending from the Byzantine text he used and the commentaries he consulted, but he eventually chose to end the catena at Mark 16:8. This is consistent with his silence regarding any possible reference to the events in Mark 16:9-20 in his comparisons between the Gospels' accounts in the commentary on Matthew. Therefore, this article recommends that GA 304 is a valuable witness to the survival of the short ending in the process of producing future critical editions. It also suggests further research into the understudied legacy of Greek catenae, in order to better understand GA 304 within its family of Patristic works.

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