

# Eyewitnesses and Healing Miracles in the Gospel of Mark

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**Abstract:** This essay builds on my extensive argument elsewhere to the effect that the Gospels are closely based on eyewitness testimony. It focuses on the nine healing miracles in the Gospel of Mark. The intention is not to offer any kind of proof that the stories really are based on eyewitness reports, but to show that Mark wanted to claim eyewitness testimony for them and that this explains some features of the narratives. The features that are discussed from this perspective are the Aramaic words of Jesus, the occurrence of personal names, and the literary construction of point of view.

**Keywords:** eyewitnesses, healing miracles, Gospel of Mark, Jesus, Aramaic in Gospels, Bartimaeus

## 1. Mark's Gospel and the Eyewitnesses

The earliest evidence we have about the origins of the Gospels outside the Gospels themselves is the famous statement by Papias, writing at the beginning of the second century. In an excerpt from the preface to his lost book, Papias said:

The Elder [i.e. John the Elder],<sup>1</sup> used to say this: Mark, in his capacity as Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately as many things as he recalled from memory—though not in an ordered form—of the things either said or done by the Lord. For he [Mark] neither heard the Lord nor accompanied him, but later, as I said, [he heard and accompanied] Peter, who used to give his teachings in the form of anecdotes [*chreiai*], but had no intention of providing an ordered arrangement of the oracles [*logia*] of the Lord. Consequently Mark did nothing wrong when he wrote down some individual items just as he [Peter?] related them from memory.<sup>2</sup>

There was a time when many, probably most scholars thought this a credible and plausible view of Mark's Gospel, but more recently most have dismissed it.

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<sup>1</sup> John the Elder was a disciple of Jesus whose teaching was known to Papias.

<sup>2</sup> My translation from Papias, quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.14-16.

The reason has been largely that the way of conceiving Gospel origins that originated with the form critics early in the last century cannot allow it. For the form critics, Mark's Gospel has to be the end result of a long chain of oral traditioning. There was no possibility, according to form criticism, that a Gospel writer could have acquired his material directly from an eyewitness of the events.

In my book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* I challenged the whole thesis of the form critics as to how the Gospels originated. I argued that, in general, the way the eyewitnesses told their stories about Jesus and transmitted his teaching was rarely very far back behind the text of the Gospels as we have them. Among other things, I argued that there is good reason to rehabilitate Papias's claims about the Gospel of Mark.<sup>3</sup> It has sometimes been said that, if we did not have the testimony of Papias, there is nothing about Mark's Gospel itself that would lead us to think that it derived in any special sense from Peter. I argued that, on the contrary, Mark has designed his Gospel to be read as a narrative that embodies, to a large extent, Peter's eyewitness testimony, while also indicating other eyewitness sources for some of the events.

This argument depends on a prior argument about the genre of the Gospels, on which most recent scholarship takes a very different view from that of the form critics. The Gospels, most scholars now think, are biographies—not of course the kind of works we call biographies in modern literature, but the kind that were current in Greco-Roman antiquity.<sup>4</sup> In the case of the biography of a figure who lived within recent memory, like the Gospel of Mark, people would have expected it to be based on eyewitness testimony and would be alert to indications of who the eyewitnesses were. It was not necessary for the author to make explicit statements about his sources, still less to interrupt the flow of the narrative in order to do so. Skilled narrators had ways of highlighting the eyewitnesses by means of the way they appear in the narratives.<sup>5</sup>

The prominence of the figure of Peter in Mark's Gospel is remarkable. His name (either Simon or Peter) occurs twenty-six times.<sup>6</sup> When we take into account of the length of the Gospel (much the shortest of the four), this is a considerably higher frequency than in the other Gospels. In addition, Peter is the first of Jesus's disciples to be named (emphatically, with a redundant repetition of his name) and the last disciple to be named in Mark's Gospel (1:16; 16:7). I argued that this is a deliberate literary device, which I called the *inclusio* of eyewitness

3 R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2018) chapters 2, 7, 9.

4 See, most recently, C.S. Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2019).

5 Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 515-535.

6 Mark 1:16 (twice); 1:29, 30, 36; 3:16 (twice); 5:37; 8:29, 32, 33; 9:2, 5; 10:28; 11:21; 13:3; 14:29, 33, 37 (twice), 54, 66, 67, 70, 72; 16:7.

ness testimony, that marks out Peter as the Gospel's principal eyewitness source. The pattern of naming corresponds to the fact that Peter is actually present for a very large part of the narrative, more than in the case of any other character except Jesus, although in many cases Peter is there as part of a group of disciples.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the obvious prominence of Peter in Mark's Gospel, I argued that Mark manipulates a literary feature of his narratives—what literary critics call point of view or focalization—in order to give readers the impression that it is from Peter's perspective that they are viewing the events.<sup>8</sup>

However, while Mark's narrative implies that Peter is his principal eyewitness source, he is not the only such source. For a very important section of the narrative—everything that happens after Peter's threefold denial of Jesus—Peter is quite clearly not present at the events. So Mark introduces here the women disciples of Jesus, carefully located at the cross, the burial and the empty tomb, and repeatedly said to have seen what happened (Mark 15:40-41, 47; 16:1, 4-6). They are the eyewitnesses whose presence in Peter's absence confirms my claim that in Peter's presence he is usually the eyewitness source.<sup>9</sup> But I still say "usually" because there may also be specific stories that come from other, minor eyewitnesses, such as someone who told the story of his or her own encounter with Jesus. I shall argue for one such possibility later in this article.

## 2. Stories of Healing

My focus in the rest of this article is on the healing miracles in Mark's Gospel. I distinguish healing miracles from exorcisms, since I think that such a distinction is quite clear in Mark. One key difference is that in exorcisms Jesus's liberating command is addressed to the demons, while in healings his healing command is addressed to the person who is being healed.

The Table lists the nine healing miracle stories in Mark and some key features of them. It is important to note that they are all very different. If Mark worked with some sort of template of the miracle story (in the language of form criticism a "form"), it can only have been the broadest of outlines. Of features that recur, the two prominent ones are the healing command, which Jesus addresses to the recipient of the healing, and the touch, in which Jesus puts his hand onto the recipient in some way. These are both ways in which Jesus communicates healing power to the sick person. The Table shows that the words and the actions vary

<sup>7</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 114-127, 510-514.

<sup>8</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 155-182, 546-547.

<sup>9</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 520-524.

according to the condition that needs to be healed. It also shows that, if we leave aside the anomalous case of the haemorrhaging woman, only six of the eight stories have a healing command, and only five have a touching action, but all have either one or the other. Three have both. So almost the only necessary feature of a healing story seems to be that they must have either a healing command or a touching action or both. The story of the haemorrhaging woman is anomalous, in that in this case the woman touches Jesus and is thereby healed, so that the healing command at the end of the story is not the means of healing but confirms the healing that has already taken place.

Table. Stories of Healing in Mark

	Privately	Healing command	Touch
<b>Simon (Peter)</b> 's mother-in-law 1:29-31	✓	✗	took her by the hand and lifted her up
Leper 1:40-45	✓?	Be made clean!	stretched out his hand and touched him
Paralytic 2:1-12	✗	Stand up, take your mat and go to your home!	✗
Withered hand 3:1-6	✗	Stretch out your hand!	✗
<b>Jairus</b> 's daughter 5:21-24a, 35-43	✓	Little girl, get up! <i>Talitha cum!</i>	took her by the hand
Haemorrhaging woman 5:24b-34	✗	(cf. v 24)	(she touched his cloak)
Deaf-mute 7:31-37	✓	Be opened! <i>Ephphatha!</i>	finger into ears, spat and touched tongue
Blind man 8:22-26	✓	✗	put saliva on eyes, laid hands on him
<b>Bartimaeus</b> 10:46-52	✗	Go; your faith has made you well	✗

The Table also highlights three other features that are much less frequent in the stories, but are the ones I wish to discuss in connexion with the issue of eye-witnesses. In just two cases (Jairus's daughter and the deaf-mute) Mark gives the healing command in Aramaic and then translates it into Greek. Why he did so I shall discuss shortly, but the Table shows that these two healing commands are in other respects very much like the kinds of commands Jesus gives in other healing stories. Like the others, they ask the recipient to do something that can

only be done with Jesus's healing power enabling them, and, like the others, the command is tailored to the specific condition that needs to be healed.

Another feature that distinguishes some healings from others is the audience, which is indicated in the second column of the Table. In three cases (indicated by the large ticks) Jesus makes sure that the healing takes place away from the crowd. In two other cases (the healing of Peter's mother-in-law and probably the leper) we can assume that no crowd was looking on, but the privacy is incidental. Jesus does not deliberately secure it and Mark does not draw attention to it. In three cases (the paralytic, the haemorrhaging woman, and Bartimaeus) the healing takes place in the context of the large crowds that follow Jesus everywhere in Mark's narrative. In the case of the man with a withered hand, the healing is located in a synagogue and, although Mark mentions only the Pharisees who were there, it is natural to assume that many other people were present for the Sabbath service. That leaves just three healings in which Jesus excludes the crowds and performs the healing in the presence of just a few other people (Jairus's daughter, the deaf-mute, and the blind man). Two of these three (Jairus's daughter and the blind man) are the occasions on which Mark records Jesus's healing command in Aramaic.

In the first columns, I have highlighted the three personal names, the only personal names that occur in these stories other than the name of Jesus. One of the three named persons is the recipient of the healing (Bartimaeus), the other two are close relatives who request the healing from Jesus (Simon Peter and Jairus).

The question I wish to address is: Does Mark give us any specific indications that these stories come from eyewitnesses of the events? I shall do this by taking up two features that already in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* I highlighted as indications of that kind, though I did not then consider healing miracles in particular. They are (1) the use of personal names in the stories and (2) the way Mark constructs the point of view from which readers see the narratives happen. In addition to those two considerations, I shall initially address Mark's quotation of Aramaic words of Jesus in two of these stories.

### 3. Lexical Aramaisms

A very striking feature of Mark's Gospel, which distinguishes it from the other Gospels, is the remarkable number of Semitic words that appear, given in transliteration into Greek, quite often accompanied by a Greek translation.<sup>10</sup> Although it is not easy

<sup>10</sup> H.P. Rüger, "Die lexikalischen Aramaismen im Markusevangelium," *Markus-Philologie: historische, literargeschichtliche und stilistische Untersuchungen zum zweiten Evangelium* (ed. H. Cancik) (WUNT 33; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1984) 73-84, lists and discusses twenty-one lexical Aramaisms (either single words or phrases) in Mark.

in every case to decide whether these words are Aramaic or Hebrew, the majority are undoubtedly Aramaic. They certainly show that Mark was at home in a bilingual environment, perhaps even a trilingual environment. But, beyond that implication, it is not possible to explain Mark's use of all these words in the same way. For example, the words *korban*<sup>11</sup> and *Gehenna* are presumably used because they are technical terms (though Mark shows that he is aware that they need explanations).<sup>12</sup> Others are names of persons (such as Bartimaeus) or places (such as Capernaum).

We need to distinguish between Aramaic words that Mark uses within a Greek sentence and what linguists call "code switching" or language switching,<sup>13</sup> where Mark provides a whole utterance of Jesus in Aramaic and then translates it. There are three examples: the two healing commands in the healing stories that we have already noticed (5:41; 7:34) and the cry of desolation from the cross (15:34: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). Scholars have tended to treat the latter differently from the healing commands, and so for our present purposes we shall restrict discussion to the healing commands. Of course, they are very short utterances (only two Aramaic words in 5:41, and one Aramaic word in 7:34), but they are complete utterances.

Most attempts to explain why Mark has provided the Aramaic of these words of Jesus focus on their function as words that effect the healing:

(1) Many scholars have cited as a parallel the use of foreign words and especially foreign names (*nomina barbarata*) in ancient magic, including healings. These were often strings of nonsense words sounding like words or divine names in other languages. Very often these magical formulae were to be kept secret and workers of healing miracles, such as Apollonius of Tyana, therefore whispered them into the ears of the person being healed. In this respect it is notable that in Mark's two narratives, as we have noticed, Jesus takes special measures to ensure privacy when he performs the miracle.<sup>14</sup>

(2) A weaker form of the same approach suggests that the foreign words increase the readers' sense of mystery around the miracle.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> A Hebrew loanword in Aramaic.

<sup>12</sup> Mark 7:11; 9:43, 45, 47.

<sup>13</sup> See S.-I. Lee, *Jesus and Gospel Traditions in Bilingual Context: A Study in the Interdirectionality of Language* (BZNW 186; Berlin: De Gruyter 2012) 281-393.

<sup>14</sup> R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, revised ed. (trans. J. Marsh) (Oxford: Blackwell 1972) 213; G. Theissen, *Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (trans. F. McDonagh) (Edinburgh: Clark 1983) 64-65; J. Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (AB 27; New York: Doubleday 1999) 363; F.L. Horton, "Nochmals *ephphatha* in Mk 7:34," *ZNW* 77 (1986) 101-108. There is a critique of Horton's argument in J. Maier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. II. Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday 1994) 759, n. 159.

<sup>15</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 363; cf. R.H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1993) 274-275, 384, who thinks that to 'westerners ... the easternness of the Aramaic phrase connotes great power,' but that this is the naked power of Jesus, stripped of all magic by Mark's translation.

(3) Some scholars see here evidence that early Christians thought Jesus' actual Aramaic words had power,<sup>16</sup> and that early Christian miracle workers would have wanted to use the actual words of Jesus in Aramaic for performing healings themselves. So Mark is providing useful material for Christian healers.<sup>17</sup>

However, there are a number of considerations that make these kinds of explanation improbable:

(1) The Aramaic words are neither names nor gibberish, as in magical formulae.

(2) To Mark's audience it must be clear that within the setting of his narrative the Aramaic words are neither foreign nor mysterious. Jesus speaks rather ordinary and obvious words in the language understood by his hearers within the narrative.

(3) To Mark's audience themselves the words would not seem mysterious, since Mark translates them.

(4) Mark himself clearly does not think that these are words that should be kept secret, since he records them. The motif of secrecy in these narratives must be related to the attempts by Jesus, accompanying the miracles in some of Mark's other miracle stories, to keep the news of his miracles from spreading, as when he tells the leprosy sufferer to say nothing to anyone (1:43-44). What Jesus does not want to be generally known are the miracles themselves, not the techniques he uses to effect them.

(5) As we have noticed the words in question are very similar to the healing words that Jesus pronounces in other miracle stories, where Mark does not give the words in Aramaic. For example, Jesus says to the leprosy sufferer, "Be made clean!" (1:42), and to the paralyzed man, "Stand up!" (2:11). This surely refutes the notion that Mark provides the Aramaic words of healing so that Christian healers could use the exact same words. If these healers needed such words, then they would need to know the words to use to heal leprosy sufferers, paralyzed people and blind people, just as much as they would need the words for healing deaf people or little girls who have died. It makes no sense to claim that Mark provided them with the Aramaic words in only two cases.

Nearer the mark, perhaps, is Richard France's claim that the Aramaic words are part of Mark's vivid recreation of the scene.<sup>18</sup> It is true that many of Mark's narratives are characterized by vivid details that display his skill as a master storyteller, but reporting the Aramaic words and then translating them is a very particular sort of detail that is hardly a standard feature of vivid narrative writing. (I know of no parallel in ancient narrative writing.) However, France's comment

<sup>16</sup> A.Y. Collins, *Mark* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2007) 372.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. D.E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St Mark*, revised ed. (Pelican NT Commentaries; London: Black 1968) 162.

<sup>18</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans – Carlisle: Paternoster 2002) 240.

is helpful if we take ‘recreation’ to be the operative word. Mark is engaged in ‘vivid *recreation* of the scene.’ The Aramaic words are a claim to *historical authenticity*. While vivid details generally bring a narrative to life for an audience, giving them a sense of being there in the scene, Mark’s citations of Jesus’ actual Aramaic words offer an assurance that this is what really happened. They constitute a claim that the story derives from someone who was there at the time and remembered Jesus’ actual words. They are an indication of eyewitness testimony. In stating this hypothesis, I want to be clear that, of course, the Aramaic words could not *prove* that the story really is eyewitness testimony. Any Aramaic speaker, including Mark himself, could have supplied the words. They constitute not proof of eyewitness testimony, but a claim to eyewitness testimony. They are one more of the several ways in which Mark suggests to his readers that his work is based on the stories as the eyewitnesses told them.

But why just these two instances? Why not in all the miracle stories? The answer may be simply that Mark did not want to overdo this device, which might become tedious, interrupting the flow of the narratives. But it may be relevant to recall that these two healing stories are two of the three in which the healing takes place in private. In the third of those, the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida, there are no healing words. It is worth recalling the precise context in each case. In the story of the raising of Jairus’s daughter, Jesus excludes from the sick room all the people gathered in the house except the child’s parents and the three disciples Peter, James and John (5:37-40). In the case of the deaf man, Mark narrates that Jesus takes him aside in private, away from the crowd (7:33). In this case Mark does not tell us precisely who else witnesses the miracle, but clearly some do, since Jesus subsequently orders them not to tell anyone (7:36). Probably the people who brought the man to Jesus are intended. The point is that with the emphasis on secrecy in both cases, Mark may have thought it especially appropriate to assure his readers that there was at least one witness who observed the miracle sufficiently carefully as to recall Jesus’s actual words of healing.

#### 4. Names

In *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, I pointed to a feature of the way personal names occur in the Gospels that had not been satisfactorily explained.<sup>19</sup> It is not surprising that major characters, like the leading disciples of Jesus, or public figures, like Herod or Pilate, are named in the Gospels. Characters that recur at several points in the Gospel story almost require names so that readers can identify them.

<sup>19</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 39-66.

But minor characters, who appear in only one episode, are generally not named in the Gospels. This is understandable. There is no strictly literary reason for naming them and, from a historical point of view, their names may not have been remembered. They may always have been anonymous in the minds of those who remembered the stories. But this understandable anonymity of minor characters makes it all the more remarkable that a few of them are named. Why should this be? I suggested the answer may be that it was these persons who first told their stories. They were the eyewitnesses and their names stuck to their stories when the Gospel writers recorded them. There was no inevitability that this should happen, as we can see if we compare Mark with Matthew and Luke in cases where they are following Mark. The name Jairus in Mark is retained by Luke but not by Matthew, who abbreviates this story drastically (Mark 5:22; Matt 9:18; Luke 8:41), whereas the name Bartimaeus is dropped by Luke as well as by Matthew (Mark 10:46; Matt 20:30; Luke 18:35). The occurrence of such names, such as those examples in Mark or Zacchaeus and Clopas in Luke (19:2; 24:18), could well be regarded as indicating relative closeness to source.

Does this thesis hold water with regard to Mark's healing stories? As we have seen, of the nine individuals healed, only Bartimaeus is named, but in the case of two others a close relative is named: Simon and Jairus. The story of the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law is actually the first of the healing miracles and belongs to the way in which Mark in the early stages of his narrative is establishing Peter as his principal eyewitness source. In the story of the call of the first disciples, Simon is named emphatically twice (1:16), and his next appearance is the story of the healing of his mother-in-law, in which again Simon is named twice (1:29-30). As for Jairus, a case could be made for his being a source of the story of the raising of his daughter, though Peter himself is also named as present at the miracle. But the case of Bartimaeus is particularly interesting.

About the name, it is worth noting that it is a typical Aramaic form of patronymic (*bar* meaning "son of"), which Mark translates into Greek as he does so many Aramaic words and expressions. There are two other Aramaic *bar*-names in Mark (Bartholomew and Barabbas),<sup>20</sup> one more in Matthew (Bar-Jonah, Peter's patronymic)<sup>21</sup> and three others in the New Testament outside the Gospels (Barnabas, Bar-Sabbas, and Bar-Jesus).<sup>22</sup> These transliterated Aramaic patronymics are very rare elsewhere in Greek literature (including Jewish Greek literature).<sup>23</sup> They suggest the closeness of the Gospels and Acts to Jewish Palestinian sources and probably to oral rather than literary sources.

<sup>20</sup> Mark 3:18; 15:7, 11, 15. Note also the plural Boanerges: 3:17.

<sup>21</sup> Matt 16:17.

<sup>22</sup> Barnabas: Acts 4:36 (and frequently); Bar-Sabbas (two individuals) Acts 1:23; 15:22; Bar-Jesus: Acts 13:6.

<sup>23</sup> For example, there are none in Josephus, who translates such names.

We should notice also the emphatic way in which Bartimaeus is introduced at the beginning of the story: “The son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was seated by the road-side” (10:46). Readers of Mark, who have grown accustomed to such minor characters being anonymous, will immediately have the impression that there is something special about this character. Contrast the effect of the parallel in Luke, who omits the name: “A certain blind man was seated by the road-side begging” (18:35). Moreover, the way that Mark’s narrative foregrounds this man’s name will have been all the more striking in that he belongs to almost the lowest stratum of society. I doubt if there is another blind beggar with a name in the whole of ancient literature.<sup>24</sup> Usually it was the elite who got to be named in ancient literature, and Luke’s retention of the name Jairus from Mark but omission of the name Bartimaeus may possibly reflect that, attesting not a conviction on Luke’s part but a social habit.

The end of Mark’s story is also relevant to his naming of Bartimaeus. After regaining his sight, Bartimaeus followed Jesus “on the way” (10:52). This is meant literally, but Mark says it surely because it was also the case metaphorically. Bartimaeus became a disciple of Jesus (something Mark’s readers are not told about any of the other persons Jesus healed) and followed on the way, that is, the way of faith and discipleship practised by the early Christian movement.<sup>25</sup> Very plausibly, he became a member of the early Jerusalem church, where Mark could have known him. He would have told his story of his life-changing encounter with Jesus many times to anyone he could get to listen. His name would have been already known to at least some of Mark’s first readers. (I guess the same would be true of Jairus, but in Bartimaeus’s case we have a clear indication by Mark that he belonged to the early Christian movement.)

In order to take further my suggestion that Mark names Bartimaeus because he was the source of the story, I need to move on to my third category of indications of eyewitness testimony.

## 5. Point of View

Point of view (also known as focalization) is a technical term in literary criticism. It refers to the position from which readers view what is happening in a narrative.

<sup>24</sup> Oedipus, blinded by his own hand, is a member of the elite until his action reduces him to beggary, but he is a character from the mythical past.

<sup>25</sup> J. Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox 1992) 34-37; G.H. Twelftree, *Jesus: The Miracle Worker: A Historical and Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity 1999) 91.

It can have both spatial and psychological dimensions.<sup>26</sup> For us the spatial is the more important, but we need to take account of both. When we read a narrative we view a scene the narrative creates for us. We may be viewing it from the narrator's point of view, i.e. from a position quite outside the imaginary space of the story. Or, because the narrative is told in such a way as to do this for us, we may find ourselves sharing the spatial standpoint of one or a group of the characters, e.g. in a Markan story, Jesus's disciples. Or the point of view may switch around from one character's point of view to another. As well as sharing a character's spatial standpoint, we may also be privy to that character's mental and emotional perspective on what is happening, especially if the narrator tells us what that character is thinking.

So, in the story of Bartimaeus, from what point of view are we encouraged to see or hear what happens? (It's important in this case to specify "see or hear.") Certainly we do not view what goes on from the perspective of Jesus or of the group of disciples with him, because they are surrounded by the large crowd and most of the story happens outside the crowd. We notice Bartimaeus (put emphatically in our view by Mark) sitting by the roadside, while to Jesus and the disciples he is hidden by the crowd. And from that point onwards, the story proceeds vocally, not visually, as it would do for a blind man. Bartimaeus hears that it is Jesus of Nazareth who is approaching; he cries out; he hears people in the crowd telling him to be quiet; he cries out all the more loudly. With the good hearing of the blind, he hears Jesus say, "Call him here"; he hears the encouragement of the crowd to get up and go to Jesus. And so he does, throwing aside the cloak that maybe he had arranged around his knees to receive coins from people passing. He springs up and goes to Jesus, not necessarily helped by members of the crowd but perhaps finding his way with the skills of hearing and direction that blind people have. I have described his point of view spatially, but we also easily feel as he does. The way the story is told from his perspective draws unto empathy with him.

All this detail is not just good storytelling. It serves the theme of the story in that it demonstrates the faith that Jesus then says has made the man well. Bartimaeus's refusal to be silenced, his persistence, his eagerness all exemplify his confidence that Jesus can and will heal him. This highlighting of the faith of the suppliant is occasional, but not by any means universal, in Mark's healing stories. It is explicit in the cases of the paralytic and of the haemorrhaging woman, but in neither of those cases is the focalization on the suppliant sustained so consistently as it is in Bartimaeus's case. If this is due to Mark's narrative skill, as no

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<sup>26</sup> G. Yamasaki, *Watching a Biblical Narrative: Point of View in Biblical Exegesis* (London: Clark 2007); *idem*, *Perspective Criticism: Point of View and Evaluative Guidance in Biblical Narrative* (Eugene, OR: Cascade 2012) 18-53.

doubt it is at some level, we must also ask what there was about the story as he heard it told that led him to narrate it in this way. Does the fact that the narrative focalizing is achieved here with such superb convincingness owe something to the fact that Bartimaeus himself naturally told the story from his own perspective and plausibly with some narrative skill of his own? This is very difficult to tell, of course, and I do not wish to press too far the idea that Mark reproduces the way Bartimaeus told the story. More important, I think, is the fact by telling the story so consistently from Bartimaeus's perspective Mark gives his readers the sense that they are being given Bartimaeus's eyewitness testimony. In other words, Mark's literary strategy constructs the eyewitness perspective that he is, in effect, claiming to convey.

Finally, I think there is yet another relevant aspect of the story of Bartimaeus. When Bartimaeus meets Jesus, he addresses him using the Aramaic title *Rabbouni*.<sup>27</sup> This is found nowhere else in Mark's Gospel, and in all the Gospels it occurs elsewhere only in John 20:16, where Mary Magdalene uses it. Mark is quite careful and deliberate about the way people address Jesus. Ten times in Mark, people, including disciples, address Jesus as "Teacher" (*διδάσκαλε*),<sup>28</sup> which Mark presumably understood to represent the Aramaic or Hebrew title *Rabbi*. The Syro-Phoenician woman, uniquely, calls Jesus "Lord" or "Sir" (*κύριε*), no doubt because she is a Gentile (7:28). The word *Rabbi*, in Greek transliteration, occurs only three times, used twice by Peter (9:5; 11:51) (it is the only way Peter addresses Jesus), and once by Judas when he greets Jesus in Gethsemane and kisses him (14:45).

I suggest that, just as Mark uses Aramaic words in the mouth of Jesus to indicate eyewitness testimony, so he uses *Rabbi* and *Rabbouni*. In the story of the Transfiguration (9:2-7), Peter's words to Jesus, introduced by "Rabbi," help (along with Mark's comment about Peter's state of mind) to establish that the story is told from Peter's perspective and derives from his testimony. Similarly with Bartimaeus's use of *Rabbouni*, which readers who have observantly followed Mark's narrative up to this point will recognize as distinctive.

## Conclusion

I have argued that in several of the healing stories Mark has provided his readers with additional assurances that he is reflecting eyewitness accounts: Aramaic words of Jesus, personal names and point of view. I may need to stress that in no

<sup>27</sup> On this title, see J.-C. Moreau, "Rabbouni," *RB* 119 (2012) 403-420.

<sup>28</sup> Mark 4:38; 9:17, 38; 10:17, 20, 35; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1.

sense should these be regarded as new criteria of authenticity for the quest of the historical Jesus. The use of criteria of authenticity applied to each unit of the Synoptic tradition individually to assess its worth as a tradition about the historical Jesus had as its premise the form critical view of the development of the Gospel traditions before they reached the Gospel writers. If the traditions circulated in the oral traditions as separate units and as anonymous traditions, not attributed to eyewitnesses or tradents, and were passed on by their use in communities for their own purposes, then the only way to assess their historical value would be to apply especially rigorous tests to each distinct unit of tradition. My general proposal about the evangelists' sources—that the evangelists themselves had good access to eyewitnesses and eyewitness reports—offers a quite different model for origins of the Gospels. It means that the way to assess the historical reliability of the Gospels is to do what historians normally do with literary sources: they assess the general reliability of a source, a source being a literary work such as the Gospel of Mark. This may well involve assessing the reliability of some contents of the source where other sources allow it to be verified, but it is never possible to assess the reliability of this or that report contained within a literary source. Rather, if we judge the general reliability of a source positively, then we rely on it, in broad terms, as a trustworthy witness.

My argument in this essay concerns the implicit claims of Mark's narrative to reflect eyewitness accounts. Mark, I believe, deliberately designed his narrative so that it reads like a narrative based on eyewitness sources, primarily Peter, but also the women disciples and a few others such as Bartimaeus. He does so through his use of personal names, his manipulation of literary point of view, and some other occasional indications such as quoting Jesus's words in Aramaic.

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