

Archaic Mark (Greg.-Aland 2427): A Story of a Modern Forgery

Posted by **Tommy Wasserman** at 10:54 ·  13 



In 1945 E. C. Colwell announced a manuscript containing "the text of the Gospel of Mark in a more primitive form than any other known manuscript." The codex had been found among the property left of John Askitopoulos, an Athenian collector and dealer of antiquities, who had died in 1917. Almost twenty years later, in 1935, it was offered for sale to Edgar J. Goodspeed by a nephew of Askitopoulos. In 1936, or early 1937 the MS was sent to the University of Chicago where it resides today in the Goodspeed Manuscript Collection (Chicago MS 972). The MS was subsequently registered as Greg.-Aland 2427, and became known as "Archaic Mark." For a long time several questions concerning this MS remained unresolved, above all, was this manuscript authentic?

Already in 1947 in a review of a Festschrift for W. H. P. Hatch, *Munera studiosa* (eds. M. H. Shepherd Jr. and S. E. Johnson), *Journal of Religion* 27 (April 1947): 148-149, Robert P. Casey concluded that the MS was "in every way extraordinary and the curious anomalies of its script and text form a pattern strikingly similar to that of its miniatures" (p. 148). He expressed his suspicion that the manuscript could have been copied from a 19th century critical edition:

Through the kindness of my colleagues in Chicago, I have examined this manuscript and discussed its text with its closest student, Dr. M. M. Parvis. . . . The parchment is indubitably old, the text agrees not only with B but with the modern misreadings of B and there are modern Greek words here and there. . . . It is to be hoped that in the forthcoming edition a chapter may be written by an *advocatus diaboli* who would do his best to prove that the codex was a manufacture of the nineteenth century, executed by a workman with the skill and limitations of a Simonides, familiar with Lachmann's edition and the modern Greek Bible, and thinking in Greek. Perhaps he had an Armenian friend living in Constantinople or Kaiseriye who was a skillful artist. The failure of the attempt to prove this thesis would do much to clear the ground for confidence in this remarkable possession. (p. 149)

Some twenty years ago Mary Virginia Orna, Robert Nelson (specialist on Byzantine illumination), *et al.* published an article on "Applications of Infrared Microspectroscopy to Art Historical Questions about Medieval Manuscripts," *Advances in Chemistry* 4 (1988): 270-288, republished in *Archaeological Chemistry IV* (ed. R. O. Allen; Washington, DC: American Chemical Society, 1989), 265-288.

Orna and her team had applied "Fourier transform infrared microspectroscopy" to Byzantine manuscripts in the Special Collections Department of the University of Chicago Library, including a sample from an illumination in 2427. Although the illuminations in 2427 were based on a cycle that also appeared in a late 12th-century gospel book in the National Library in Athens, codex 93, the team found that the sample contained a chemical from a pigment, Prussian blue, that was not produced until the 18th century. However, the lack of authenticity observed for the illuminations did not necessarily mean that the text was late, since the illuminations could have been added much later – there are plenty of such examples.

Three years ago an article appeared in *Novum Testamentum*: Margaret M. Mitchell and Patricia A. Duncan, "Chicago's 'Archaic Mark' (Ms. 2427): A Reintroduction to Its Enigmas and a Fresh Collation of Its Readings," *Novum Testamentum* 48 (2006): 1-35.

The article announced the public release via the Internet of a full set of interactive digital images of Gregory-Aland 2427, and included a collation in order to facilitate an accurate accounting of the manuscript in further editions and textcritical studies. Moreover, Mitchell and Duncan provided a history of research and a critical appraisal of the complex questions involved in its dating. On the issue whether the manuscript was a modern forgery they pointed out: "At the very least such a suspicion still awaits the testing of the codex's readings against the various available collations and critical texts of the New Testament published in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to see if dependence can be established" (p. 7).

The manuscript images were made available [here](#).

Peter Head commented on the article on this [blog](#):

I personally found this article both very helpful and very frustrating. Like it says in the sub-title: Reintroduction to Its Enigmas! There is no attempt to solve any of the enigmas, it is basically clearing the ground for future reports on further research that remains to be done. The main feature of the article, the collation, is itself incomplete and only designed to supplement (and occasionally correct) the information in NA27. But that just means that anyone wanting to work on the text of 2427 has to compile a complete collation for herself, before beginning to work on it. Surely the Chicago folk must have done that, why not share it with everyone else?

In the same year, on 24 February, Stephen Carlson announced on his blog [Hypotyposeis](#) that he had sent in the following proposal to the SBL Annual Meeting New Testament Textual Criticism section::

The Nineteenth-Century Exemplar of "Archaic Mark" (MS 2427)

Gregory-Aland no. 2427 is an unprovenanced, illuminated manuscript of the Gospel of Mark, written in what appears to be a medieval hand. Its illuminations have been found to contain a modern pigment, but that finding does not settle the question of its curious text, which is closer to Codex Vaticanus (B) than to any other manuscript. Ever since Westcott and Hort (1881), B has been considered one of the most important manuscripts of the New Testament, so 2427's closeness to B has attracted the attention of textual critics. However, Westcott and Hort were not the first to base a critical text largely on B. Some twenty years earlier, Philipp Buttmann (1860) published a recension of the Greek New Testament based on Cardinal Mai's edition of B (1857, 1859). In the Gospel of Mark, Buttmann's text departs from B at about 90 variation units, with which 2474 agrees more than 80 times, except where 2427 has a singular reading. Significantly, 2427's support for Buttmann's departures include his mistakes that otherwise lack manuscript attestation. Even more significantly, 2427 contains scribal errors occasioned by the unique page layout of the 1860 Buttmann edition. This evidence shows that the exemplar of MS 2427 is the 1860 Buttmann edition of the New Testament or its stereotypic reprints.

So finally the *advocatus diaboli* that Casey anticipated over 60 years ago had appeared, and he was a jurist by profession! Carlson had already raised a strong case against "Secret Mark" in his *The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith's Invention of Secret Mark* (Baylor University Press, 2005). His attractive proposal on this other Mark was of course accepted and Carlson presented his paper at the SBL Annual Meeting in Washington on Tuesday 21 November in the Textual Criticism session. Interestingly, Mitchell presented a paper on the same MS at this SBL meeting (in another session). Carlson reported on his [blog](#) that he had a good colloquy with Margaret Mitchell over 2427. I have since heard that Mitchell was mostly withholding immediate judgment at that point.

Later in the same year Carlson published his finding of the fake in the SBL Forum:

Stephen Carlson, "'Archaic Mark' (MS 2427) and the Finding of a Manuscript Fake," *SBL Forum*, n.p. [cited Aug 2006]. [Online:http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=577](http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=577)

When Wieland Willker had heard of Carlson's SBL paper (which Carlson had also announced on Willker's [textual criticism discussion list](#) on 24 February, he decided to collate 2427 against Buttmann's edition. Willker subsequently reported in a message on his [discussion list](#) that he had found nine significant agreements in error between the texts, features that were unique to Buttmann's edition, and other signs of a late origin. However, Willker was still hesitant to call it a "forgery":

Is it a forgery? We cannot really know. Perhaps it was originally simply intended as a present to Mr. Askitopoulos? Or created for private entertainment? The MS turned up in the remains of Mr. Askitopoulos in the 1920s. The "who, where, when, how and why" are unknown.

However, in his subsequent on-line essay he labelled it "a fake": Manuscript 2427 - a fake, which I think is a correct description – there are a lot of examples of such forgeries in the 19th and early 20th century, not least in Athens. In the essay Willker confirmed Carlson's finding and concluded that "the probability that these errors happened independently is almost nil." On the other hand, Willker had also found many disagreements, some of which could be explained as harmonizations or as influenced by the Byzantine text, but others for which he could not find any explanation. Apparently, the scribe of the MS did not just copy Buttman's edition, he seemed to have used other sources as well.

In any case, the matter was finally settled: both the illuminations and text of 2427 are of modern origin. Note, however, that Carlson's very important finding has not yet been referenced in the bibliography available on the Goodspeed Manuscript Collection website accompanying the on-line images! The *Novum Testamentum* article by Mitchell and Duncan is the last entry.

Just a few days ago, 26 October, there was a workshop on the manuscript at the Special Collections Research Center of the University of Chicago:

"A Report on the Results of Chemical, Codicological and Textual Analysis"

Joseph Barabe, Abigail Quandt, Margaret M. Mitchell

At this special session of the Workshop, jointly sponsored by the Library's Special Collections Research Center, the final results of a multi-year commitment by the University to solve a decades-long enigma – is this miniature codex a genuine Byzantine manuscript preserving a very early text-type of the Gospel of Mark or a modern forgery? – will be announced. The manuscript itself will be available for viewing, and Barabe, Quandt and Mitchell will document their findings and their implications in advance of their forthcoming article in the journal *Novum Testamentum*. All interested parties are welcome to attend. A light reception will follow. (Please note special evening time.)

I do not know what was announced on this occasion. The question whether the MS is a forgery has of course already been settled, although the more comprehensive analysis to be published in *Novum Testamentum* is always welcome. I assume that Stephen Carlson's convincing exposure of the origin of the text will be duly acknowledged there, and I hope that reference to his work will be made in the manuscript description and bibliography on the webpage of the Goodspeed Manuscript Collection of the University of Chicago as soon as possible.

However, the story is not entirely over yet. During my work on this story I found an interesting detail that casts doubt on another manuscript. More soon!

Bibliography

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2427, Archaic Mark, hoaxes and forgeries

13 COMMENTS



Peter M. Head • 11/04/2009 11:06 am

Good summary and discussion Tommy. But what a tease at the end!

Reply

▼ REPLIES

Reply



Wieland Willker • 11/04/2009 1:21 pm

He is probably referring to 2537, which is said to be the same scribe and illuminator as 2427.

[2537: Eremitage ms. "Omega 1162", St. Petersburg (Leningrad), 12-13th CE, 8 folios, 17.5 x 12.5 cm, 1 column, 18-22 lines, Mk 14:72 - Lk 1:33]

Michael Welte (Jan. 2002, my translation) says on it: "2537 has not such a strikingly good text as 2427."

This should be checked!

Reply

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Reply



Tommy Wasserman AUTHOR • 11/04/2009 2:02 pm

Wieland, you spoil all the fun!!!

Reply

▼ REPLIES

Reply



Unknown • 11/04/2009 2:13 pm

Hellooooo,

As usual, the failure to "turn" has resulted in all this nonsense about manuscript 2427. Archaic Mark and especially its illuminations are written in the same spirit as the illuminations in the Book of Kells. They are testimonies for the chosen ones. Simply TURN the illuminations in ms. 2427 upside down! Ah, "look now" says the high priest. "You have heard from the Blasphemer, what is manifest to YOU!"

Reply

▼ REPLIES

Reply



Tommy Wasserman AUTHOR • 11/04/2009 2:27 pm

Are you secret Mark?

Reply

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Reply



Unknown • 11/04/2009 3:57 pm

Tommy,

Look at what you wrote. This is a manifestation of indignation. What you are really saying is "Be quite!" and "Stop telling me the truth!"

Reply

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Reply



Ari • 11/04/2009 5:31 pm

Thanks for this excellent discussion!

Reply

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Reply



Daniel Buck • 11/04/2009 5:56 pm

The Winter Palace in St Petersburg? This hints at an Armenian connection.
Is this the only notable ms of Mark's ending not yet commented on by James Snapp?

Reply

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Reply



James Snapp Jr • 11/05/2009 1:22 pm

Daniel,

I haven't studied 2537 and didn't even know it existed. I await TW's further comments. (Btw, St. Petersburg is just where it is housed, not where it was made.)

I offer some comments on 2427 in the big essay on **Mk. 16:9–20** (which can be downloaded at the textexcavation website), offering some specific examples of the readings that reveal a link between 2427 and "Archaic Mark."

Yours in Christ,

James Snapp, Jr.
Curtisville Christian Church
Indiana (USA)

Reply

▼ REPLIES

Reply



Tommy Wasserman AUTHOR • 11/05/2009 1:48 pm

Jim, what do you mean by "a link between 2427 and 'Archaic Mark'."?

Reply

▼ REPLIES

Reply



Daniel Buck • 11/05/2009 4:25 pm

I'm sure he meant Buttmann's text. The relevant portion of his website states:

However, in light of research by Stephen Carlson, it appears that 2427 was based to a considerable extent on the Greek text which was published by Philipp Buttmann in 1860.48

Several features unique among Greek MSS to 2427 are either shared by Buttmann's text, or are accounted for by the use of Buttmann's text as an exemplar.

- In 2427, the first part of **Mk. 6:2** is missing, as if the copyist accidentally skipped from **καὶ** to **καὶ**. In Buttmann's printed text, these two **καὶ**'s appear at the ends of two consecutive lines.
- In 2427, **Mk. 7:2** is followed immediately by 7:5: "τοὺς ἄρτους. καὶ ἐπερωτώσιν." The missing words are in parentheses in Buttmann's text.
- In 2427, **Mk. 7:9** lacks "καὶ ἐλεγεν αὐτοῖς." So does Buttmann's text.
- In 2427, **Mk. 13:14** lacks "ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοεῖτω," which is in parentheses in Buttmann's text.
- In 2427, **Mk. 14:14** is missing "εἶπατε τῷ οἰκοδεσποτῇ ὅτι ὁ διδάσκαλος λέγει· πού ἐστιν." This is exactly one line of Buttmann's text.
- In 2427, **Mk. 16:18** lacks the distinctive Alexandrian variant, "Καὶ ἐν ταῖς χερσίν."49

48 ~ Carlson has summarized the results of his research in the article "Archaic Mark (MS 2427) and the Finding of a Manuscript Fake," which is online at the SBL Forum at www.sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleId=577. A comment from Carlson about the connection between 2427 and Buttmann's text by Carlson at the textualcriticism online discussion-group elicited my own comparison of 2427 and Buttmann's text.

49 ~ The data in these comparisons is drawn from the collation of 2427 in the article "Chicago's "Archaic Mark" (2427) - A Reintroduction to its Enigmas and a Fresh Collation of Its Readings," by Margaret M. Mitchell and P.A. Duncan, in *Novum Testamentum* 48. 2006, pp. 1-45,

and the text of Novvm Testamentvm Graece, Ad Fidem Potissimvm Codices Vaticanani B Recensvit, Varias Lectiones Codicis B, Textvs Recepti, Editionvm Griesbachii Lachmanni Tischendorfii Integras Adiecit, Philippvs Bvttmann, pub. 1860 (editio quinta 1886).

Reply

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Reply



James Snapp Jr • 11/05/2009 8:10 pm

Tommy & Daniel,

Yup; "a link between Buttman's NTG and "Archaic Mark"" is what I meant. (I've been jumping from one project to another today; pardon the brain-hiccup.)

Yours in Christ,

James Snapp, Jr.

Reply

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Reply



Jan Krans-Plaisier • 11/05/2009 10:40 pm

Great post Tommy. And the question in the comments on "Secret Mark" is very funny. So thanks.

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