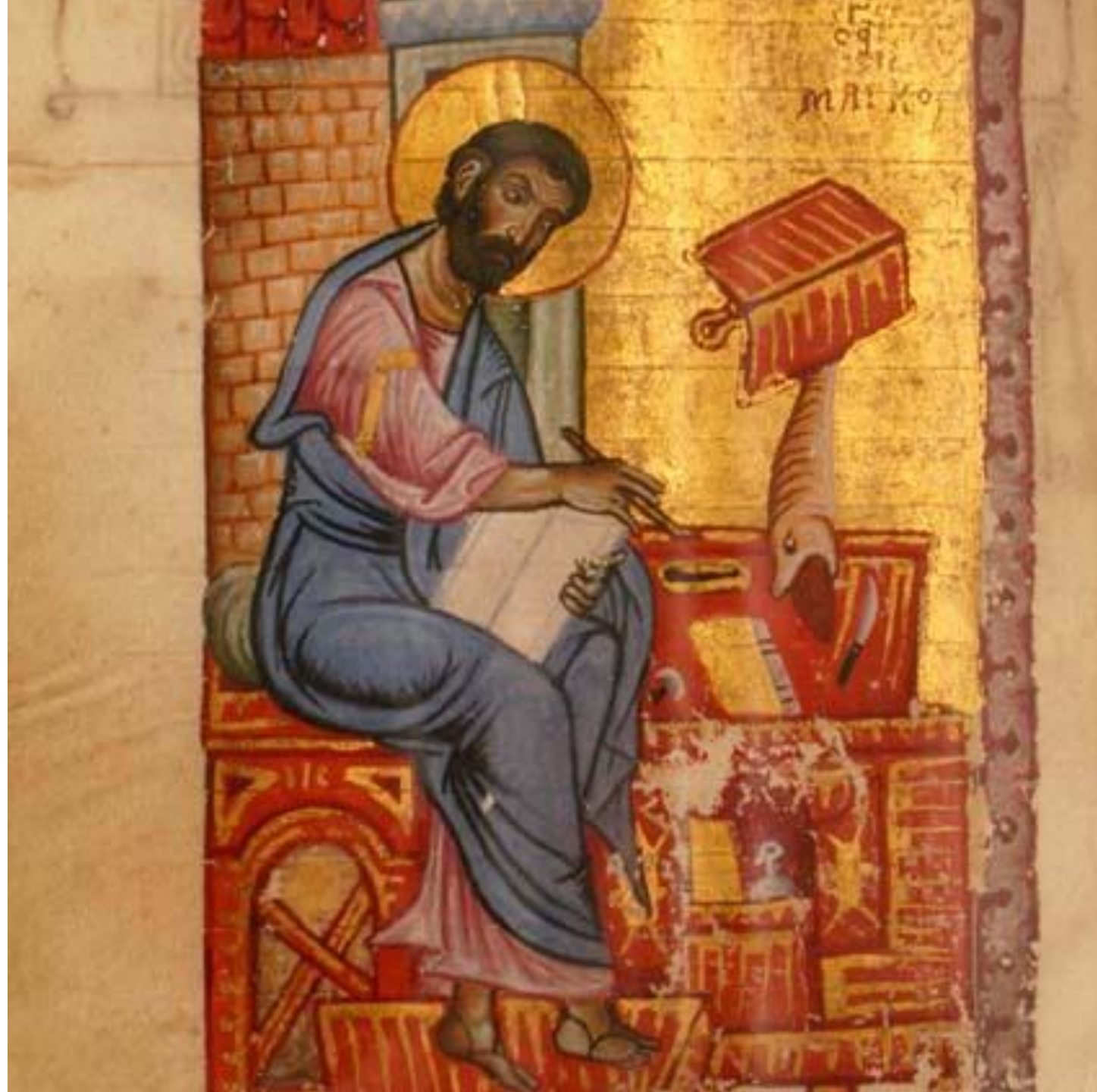
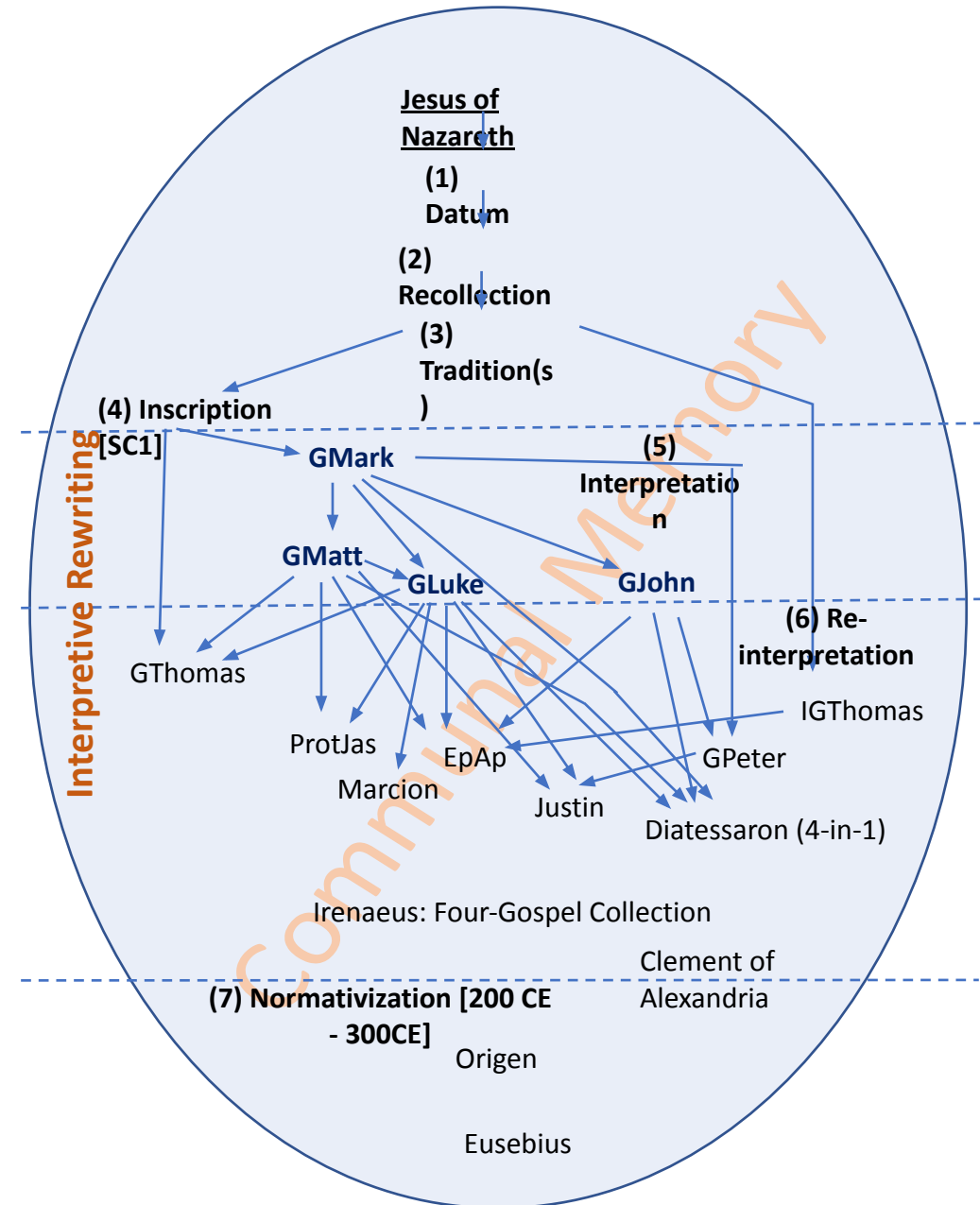


From Jesus to the Fourfold Gospel: Part 4

The Fourfold Gospel



From Jesus to the Fourfold Gospel: A scholarly perspective



From Four Gospels to Fourfold Gospel

- The four canonical Gospels are the earliest, and they are based on eyewitness testimony.
- The four canonical Gospels were written in the first century, ca. 60–100 AD, when eyewitness testimony was still in living memory.
- Beginning at about 132 AD (around the Bar Kochba revolt) onwards, non-canonical or “apocryphal” Gospels proliferated. About 40 of these were written in the second century AD, and another 40 in the following centuries.
- None of these other Gospels were written within living memory of eyewitness testimony.



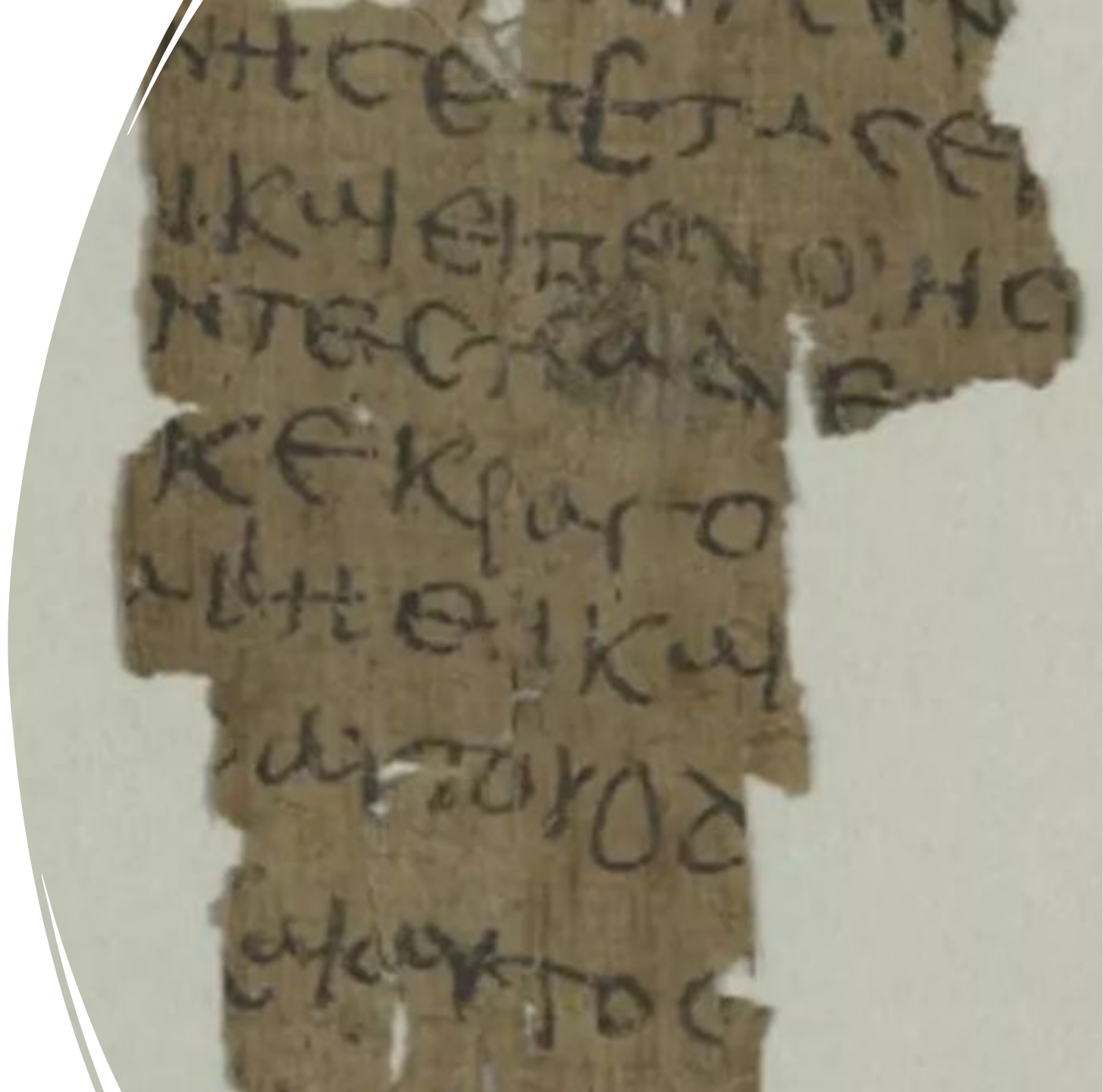
From Four Gospels to Fourfold Gospel

- Noncanonical Gospels were not necessarily heretical. Some of them were heretical, but most of them were simply the product of Christians thinking creatively about the Jesus tradition. In fact, most of them based their structure and content on the canonical Gospels (kind of like fan fiction).
- Noncanonical Gospels did not have nearly as much widespread usage as the canonical Gospels, which were read, copied, and interpreted across the Roman Empire by the mid-second century AD.



Early Christian Pseudepigrapha

- Differentiated from Patristic Literature (e.g. Apostolic Fathers, Justin, Irenaeus, Clement, Origen)
- Gospels: *Gospel of Peter*, *Protevangelium of James*
- Epistles: *Epistle of the Apostles*, *Paul's Letter to the Laodiceans*,
- Note the difference in reception of the disputed NT books and these early Christian pseudepigrapha.



Don't be surprised....

- People have always loved to write about Jesus, so of course there are a lot of books about Jesus!
- More Jesus Books or Apocryphal Acts do not necessarily mean less authority of our New Testament canon.



Apocryphal Gospels: “breeding like rabbits”

- 80+ Apocryphal Gospels / Jesus Books: e.g. Protevangelium of James, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Judas, Gospel of Mary, Gospel of Philip, Gospel of the Egyptians, Gospel of Truth, Gospel of the Savior, various papyrus fragments (P.Oxy. 210, 840, 1224; P. Egerton 2).
- 40 of these date to the second century (ca. 132–200 AD).
- None of these date to the living memory of the Jesus tradition, when the eyewitnesses were still alive.

Apocryphal Gospels: A Theological Spectrum

Orthodox:

- 1) Usually borrowing or developing material from the canonical Gospels.
- 2) Not contradicting or undermining the apostolic *kerygma*
- 3) Not promoting a Christology foreign to the canonical Gospels

Heretical:

- 1) Some borrowing, developing, or subverting material from the canonical Gospels
- 2) Contradicting or undermining the apostolic *kerygma*.
- 3) Promoting a Christology foreign to the canonical Gospels



Protevangelium
of James

Epistle of the
Apostles

Gospel of Peter

Gospel of
Thomas

Gospel of Judas

Showcase: Protevangelium of James

- 140-200 AD
- Thoroughly orthodox.

Showcase: Epistle of the Apostles

- 125-180 AD
- Recognizably orthodox.

Showcase: Gospel of the Peter

- 150–200 AD
- Not explicitly heretical, but...
- ...invites heretical, docetic, speculation on Christology.
- ...untethers Jesus' Messianic identity from the prophetic Scriptures of the OT, perhaps even avoiding altogether a Messianic understanding of Jesus' ministry.
- Places the blame of the crucifixion entirely on the Jews and condemns their people (and does not acknowledge the authority of their Scriptures).

Showcase: Gospel of Thomas

- 132-200 AD.
- Gnostic-like, mildly heretical
- Disdains the Old Testament and the “twenty-four dead prophets” of Israel.

Showcase: Gospel of Judas

- 135-180 AD.
- Blatantly anti-apostolic and heretical.

But why only four?

- Beginning in the first decades of the second century, the canonical Gospels began to be read in company with one another, forming an intertextual matrix of interpretation. Nothing of this sort happened among noncanonical Gospels.
- The four canonical Gospels are the only Gospels that accord fully with the apostolic *kerygma* (1 Cor 15:1–4).
- Hermeneutical implications: the Gospels are to be read individually, each for its own contribution to the portrait of Jesus, but they are also to be read in symphony with one another, as a collective, canonical portrait of Jesus emerges



Close reading: Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.11.8

- What is Irenaeus' main argument for the legitimacy for four and only four gospels? Is it a convincing argument? Why or why not?
- What are the theological underpinnings to Irenaeus' argument for the fourfold gospel?
- What are the hermeneutical implications for Irenaeus' theology of the fourfold gospel?



Image credit: Wikipedia

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