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The Species and Purpose of the 'Young Man' in Mark 14 and 16

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Abstract

This article presents evidence that the νεανίσκος, "young man", referred to in Mark 16 is intended to be read as a human being rather than as an angel. Matthew's and Luke's use of Mark 16 is examined to show that they too understood Mark in this way and chose to edit the text to replace the young man with one or two angels. Reading Mark 16 in this way elicits an easier linkage with the young man in Mark 14, and it is suggested that the author intended for such a connection to be made. Following Robin Scroggs and Kent Groff, this connection leads to the suggestion that the stripping and reclothing of the young man in Mark 14 and 16 is an allegory of baptism. Further evidence of this is presented in a tentative suggestion about the liturgical origins of some of Mark 16, and the observation that the word for the clothing worn by and taken from the young man in Mark 14 is only ever used elsewhere in the New Testament for the burial shroud of Jesus.

Keywords

Baptism, Luke 24.1-12, Matthew 28.1-10, Mark 14.51-52, Mark 16.1-8, νεανίσκος */Neaniskos* (young man), σινδόνα/sindona (undergarment/burial shroud)

Introduction

In all three synoptics, the women who go to the tomb on Sunday morning encounter a presence in or just outside of the tomb. In Mark's text, we are told that there is "a young man. . . dressed in a white robe" (16.5). This "young man" then tells the women about Jesus' resurrection. Matthew's account is strikingly different from this. In Matthew, as the women approach the tomb, an angel "descended from Heaven and rolled back the stone", before, almost comically, sitting on it (28.2). The angel is described as having an appearance "like lightening" and to be wearing clothes "as white as snow" (28.3). The angel proceeds to inform the women about what has happened. Luke's text also has apparently angelic intervention. In Luke, as in Mark, we find that the stone has already been moved by the time the women arrive at the tomb, but there are "two men" sitting inside the tomb, who, again, proceed to tell the women about the resurrection. The "men" in Luke are described as being dressed in "dazzling

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clothing" (24.4), not an identical description to that of the "angel" in Matthew 28.3, but one which conjures the same image. They are also described in similar terms to how the young man in Mark's account is dressed, inasmuch as the young man is dressed in white, but the men in Luke are far more vivid. In Mark, the (single) figure is only ever described as a "young man", and in Matthew, only ever as an "angel", whereas although described as "two men" by Luke 24.4, two disciples on the road to Emmaus later recount that the women had told them of a vision of "angels" (Luke 24.23).

There are therefore significant differences in the various accounts of the empty tomb in the three Synoptic Gospels. The number of figures, their identity (indeed, their very species), and the words that they say are different in the different gospels. In this article, I will examine the identity/species of the "young man" in Mark's account, and how he functions in the text. This analysis will be conducted in two sections. First, I will compare Mark's account of the empty tomb with Luke's and, to a lesser extent, because it is more straightforward, with Matthew's. I will be suggesting that how Matthew and Luke have edited Mark shows something about their understanding of at least the species of the young man in Mark's portrayal. I will also briefly analyse the text of Mark 14.51-52, pointing out that a textual variant underscores the fact that the young man who appears in those verses was a human being, but moreover an identifiable and known human being. I will be suggesting that the young man in Mark 16 is also intended to be a human being, not an angel. Second, I will show that, taken together, the two occurrences of the young man are a deliberate allegory for baptism. Here I will build on an existing suggestion along these lines, but I will add to it by a consideration of the possibility of a liturgical root for some of Mark 16, and, more concretely, by an analysis of the words used for clothing throughout Mark.

The species of the "young man"

The accounts of a figure meeting the women at the empty tomb differ from one another in Matthew, Mark and Luke. In what follows, I will begin with Matthew's and Luke's accounts before moving backwards in time to Mark's account. In doing this, the editorial decisions made by Matthew and Luke will be obvious, but Mark will remain the focus. Following this, two points of view will be presented, first, that the young man is, in fact, an angel in Mark's account, and second that he is a human. I will suggest that the text intends him to be read as a human.

Matthew's editorial strategy for the story of the empty tomb and, especially, for the young man, is that he needs an angel on the scene. Matthew edits out Mark's νεανίσκος, young man, altogether, including his presence in the tomb. The νεανίσκος is not merely replaced by an ἄγγελος, an angel, awaiting the women in the tomb, but rather, these verses are cut entirely and replaced instead by the angel descending from heaven, rolling back the stone and sitting upon it. Matthew replaces at least Mark 16.2-5 with what is now known as Matthew 28.2-4, either from another tradition which he knew, or from his own creativity. There could be several reasons that Matthew decided to have explicit mention of an "angel". John Heil suggests that the presence of the angel in the context of the rest of Matthew 28 and of Matthew 27.55-end, shows that the worldly authorities had no authority "to seal the tomb against the resurrection of Jesus", emphasised by the fact the angel sits upon the stone (for all that I also read this as a comic moment in Matthew's text).[1] Heil also points out the way in which the appearance of the angel adds to the futility of the Jewish leaders' decision to bribe the guards to say that Jesus' disciples have stolen his body

[1] John Paul Heil, "The Narrative Structure of Matthew 27.55-28.20" in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110:3 (1991), 419-38, 430.

(Matthew 28.11-15).[2] Similar suggestions have been made by other scholars. Compellingly, Dorothy Weaver writes of the guards at the tomb being struck as if they were dead at the presence of the angel, that those charged with carrying out "resurrection fraud" have been unable to deal with "resurrection truth".[3] At its simplest level, by allowing the women to see the stone being removed from the tomb, all such "resurrection fraud" is obviated for the reader of the text who accepts the veracity of its account. If, as seems likely from the account of the Jewish leaders and the soldiers in Matthew 28.11-15, denial of the resurrection based on a story of the disciples removing Jesus' body was a major concern for Matthew, then having an angel to be seen to remove the stone is important for the audience. Whatever the reason, Matthew has edited Mark's account to change the "young man" into an "angel" and to give him a very particular job to do that no one is seen to do in Mark, namely, to remove the stone from the tomb.

Luke's account is clearly based on Mark's account, but is a complete rewrite of it. To underline the complete rewrite of this story by Luke, the Greek word for "men" used in 24.4 is ἄνδρες, whereas the word for "young man" in Mark 16.5 is νεανίσκος, a word specifically indicating a "young" man. Luke also changes exactly what the δύο ἄνδρες, "two men", say, for example, deleting reference to a forthcoming meeting of Jesus and the disciples in Galilee, presumably as Jesus never goes there after his resurrection in Luke's text. Other elements of what the young man of Mark 16 says are also radically change or added to in Luke's account. Luke's version of the story of the empty tomb is based on Mark, but it is a thorough rewrite rather than a copy with a few emendations.

Many scholars have noted the way in which Luke has written deliberate intratextual links into his Gospel.[4] In 1992, Luke Timothy Johnson proposed that the two men in Luke are in fact an intertextual device.[5] Johnson points out that the "careful reader of Luke" will note the similarity with the presence of Moses and Elijah in the story of the transfiguration in Luke 9. There, Moses and Elijah appear alongside the dazzling presence of Jesus, with the two prophets being described as appearing "in glory". Furthermore, Johnson also notes that the discussion held between the prophets and Jesus on the mountaintop was about the "exodus" that Jesus would accomplish in Jerusalem.[6] If intratextuality is a deliberate feature of Luke, then it is unsurprising to find that, having been accompanied by two heavenly figures in the form of glorified prophets on the mountaintop, once the 'exodus' has indeed been accomplished, there are then two heavenly figures to point out this fact. It is probable that Luke has found his idea for having one or more human figures present at the tomb in Mark's account, albeit that there it is specifically a "young man". Luke has edited this story so that two men appear bringing it into intratextual connection with the story of the transfiguration. Johnson goes on to point out that later, in the writing of Acts, the story of the

[2] Ibid., 433.

[3] Dorothy Jean Weaver, "Matthew 28.1-10" in *Interpretation* 46:4 (1992), 398-402, 401.

[4] E.g. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Luke 2.41-52" in *Interpretation* 36:4 (1982), 399-403, Brigid Curtin Frein, "The Literary and Theological Significance of Misunderstanding in the Gospel of Luke" in *Biblica* 74: 3 (1993), 328-48, Karen Chakoian, "Luke 2:41-52" in *Interpretation* 52:2 (1998), 185-90, Paul B. Decock, "The Breaking of the Bread in Luke 24" in *Neotestamentica* 36:1-2 (2002), 39-56, , Steve Smith, *The Fate of the Jerusalem Temple in Luke-Acts: An Intertextual Approach to Jesus' Laments Over Jerusalem and Stephen's Speech* (London: T&T Clark, 2017), Rob James, *The Spiral Gospel: Intratextuality in the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2022).

[5] Luke Timothy Johnson, "Luke 24.1-11: The not-so-empty tomb" in *Interpretation* 41:1 (1992), 57-61, 59. *The Spiral Gospel: Intratextuality in the Gospel of Luke*.

[6] Ibid.

Ascension also gets a makeover from its telling in Luke 24.50-53, such that "two men" appear to interpret these events for the Apostles in what can only be a deliberate intertextual link (Acts 1.6-11). Thus, Luke's editorial decisions can be understood as deliberate policy and make good sense within this framework. Luke has put enough clues into his text to show that although described as "men" in 24.4, these figures were in fact angelic. They are alluded to as such second hand on the road to Emmaus, but the "dazzling clothing" and the fact that the women throw themselves to the ground before them are clear indications of this. Luke has therefore followed the same overall course as Matthew, making his "men" unambiguously angelic.

Having considered how Mark's text has been changed by Matthew and Luke, it is time to explore Mark itself.[7] In particular, the question is whether the νεανίσκος, young man, in Mark 16 is a human being or an angel. In his authoritative commentary on Mark, Vincent Taylor called the idea that the young man is intended to be a human figure "inadmissible" on the basis that he finds other texts in which the same word is used to describe angels.[8] However, not all of Taylor's examples are themselves admissible, as many use the noun ἀνδρα, "man"; in fact, Taylor includes Luke 24.4 in his list of phrases. Since this word is not the word used by Mark, it is hard to see how these phrases are relevant. On the other hand, Taylor does give a few examples of where "angel" is probably the intended meaning of νεανίσκος, young man. The most persuasive of these is 2 Maccabees 3.26, where the "two young men" are unmistakably angelic in nature.[9] Nevertheless, the angelic nature of the figure in Mark is not unmistakable, and Philip Oakeshott takes a different view from Taylor. Oakeshott describes the way in which the term νεανίσκος would be understood by anyone in Mark's day as literally being "a beardless youth"; it is used in the Bible and was also used in other texts and does not usually mean "angel".[10] In other words, if the text is silent on the figure really being an angel, than the audience will assume he is not. The word νεανίσκος needs to be set about with angelic clues for it to be read as meaning anything other than a literal "young man". To this point, Oakeshott notes that angels tend to be depicted in "radiant" clothing. This is not the case for the "young man" in Mark 16. He is dressed in white, which Oakeshott remarks is a description of someone's "best clothing".[11] Oakeshott comments that the only other νεανίσκος in Mark is the "youngster who ran naked from Gethsemane" in Mark 14.51-52, who is certainly intended to be taken as a human being.[12]

In the story of Jesus' arrest in chapter 14, Mark tells of the soldiers laying hold of a νεανίσκος, young man. The implication in the text is that he was only caught by his clothing, and, breaking free, γυμνός ἔφυγεν, ran off, naked. This νεανίσκος, is left unidentified in the text, although he is often identified either as the Evangelist himself, or some other ideal witness to the events that unfold.[13] In thinking about the young man in Mark 14.51-52, an analysis of a

[7] Were it to have been a genuine text, then the so-called "secret Gospel of Mark" would be of great interest as it gives details related to the "young man". The rumour of such a text began in the early Church, but is almost certainly without merit. A text purporting to be this "secret Gospel" was allegedly discovered in the 1970s. There was always suspicion that it was a twentieth century creation, and in 2010, Francis Watson proved beyond any doubt that the text is fraudulent. He has even found the name of its creator, spelt out in Greek characters in the guise of a scribal error in the middle of the text. See Francis Watson, "Beyond Suspicion: on the Authorship of the Mar Saba Letter and the Secret Gospel of Mark" in the *Journal of Theological Studies* 61:1 (2010), 128-70.

[8] Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (Macmillan 1953), 606f.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Philip Oakeshott, "How unlike an Angel: The Youth in Mark 16" in *Theology* 111:863 (2008), 362-9, 362ff.

[11] Ibid, 364ff.

[12] Ibid., 364.

[13] For example, Michael J. Haren and M. J. Haren, "The Naked Young Man: a Historian's Hypothesis on Mark 14, 51-51" in *Biblica* 79:4 (1998), 252-31.

minor textual variant is helpful in establishing the fact that Mark sees at least this young man as a real human being, and moreover presents him as a known and identifiable human being, even if that identity remains unknown to us. The usually accepted reading of Mark 14.51 begins by saying καὶ νεανίσκος τις συνηκολούθει αὐτῷ, "and a certain young man was following/accompanying him". This is on the basis of the heavy-weight MSS Sinaiticus (fourth century) and Vaticanus (fifth century), but also others such as Ephraemi Rescriptus (fifth century), and various later texts. However, the majority of MSS have a different reading, beginning the verse instead with the words καὶ εἰς τις νεανίσκος συνηκολούθει αὐτῷ. This can be translated in English in an identical way to the version above, "and a certain young man was following/accompanying him". However, the text of the majority of MSS moves the word τις, "a certain [person/thing]", or, "someone", prior to the word νεανίσκος, "young man", and adds the numeral εἰς, "one", prior to τις, underlining the idea of this "young man" being "a certain one". Although the movement of τις and the addition of εἰς do little to change the meaning of the verse, the choice of the majority of MSS to place these words prior to νεανίσκος, "young man", makes the fact of this being a particular, presumably identifiable, "young man" all the more obvious to a reader. Whether the majority of the MSS or the few, which have these words in a different order, preserve the more original reading is not finally deducible from this. However, that there is a textual tradition emphasising to an even greater extent the idea that this "young man" was a known person implies that this fact was at least assumed. Whether or not there is any historical veracity to such a claim, it is the case that in both readings of Mark 14.51, the young man is presented as someone identifiable. We can no longer be sure of that identity, and we cannot prove beyond reasonable doubt whether he is a literary or historical figure, but both known and identifiable he certainly was, or was at least presumed to be.

If we only had the Gospel of Mark and did not have the Synoptic accounts of Matthew and Luke, then, as Oakeshott's article demonstrates, the most natural reading of Mark's νεανίσκος at the tomb in Mark 16 is that this is in fact a young man, rather than an angel. The identification of the being as angelic in Matthew and Luke makes it easy to be conditioned to read Mark in this, anachronistic, way. Who then is the "young man" in the tomb? Unlike in Luke's text, there is little evidence that Mark wrote his text with any particular expectation that it would be read and reread. However, if the "young man" in the tomb is intended to be a human being, then there is a potential link to the only other "young man" in the Gospel, the one who follows or accompanies Jesus and escapes *sans* clothes. It does not matter for the purposes of this article whether or not the young man in question is historical or merely a literary invention. The question is whether he is related to, or, indeed, one and the same as, the young man in the tomb. Below, I will suggest that these two young men are indeed related to one another in the text of Mark, and provide us with an allegory for baptism.

The baptismal link

From a detailed study of Greek literature, Howard Jackson emphasises the way in which the shedding of garments adds to the vividness of the story, giving a sense of a real situation. Jackson believes this is the sole purpose of the shedding of the young man's clothing.[14] He says that anything beyond this, any attempt to connect the two instances of "young man" in Mark 14 and 16 lacks "narrative coherence and contextual integrity".[15] However, there is another way of looking at these matters. Jackson was, in part, responding to an article by Robin Scroggs

[14] Howard M. Jackson, "Why the Youth Shed His Cloak and Fled Naked: The Meaning and Purpose of Mark 14.51-52" in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116:2 (1997), 273-89.

[15] Ibid., 273.

and Kent Groff from some decades previously, and their article remains persuasive. The core of their argument is that the two νεανίσκος figures relate to one another via the concept of Baptism. The earliest baptismal rites involved the shedding of garments, then the baptism, then the putting on of new garments. Scroggs and Groff admit that the records of such liturgies only go back to the second century, but there is no sense in which they are novel at that point; the practice is clearly far older. There is no reason to suppose that Mark's church did not practice this.[16] The imagery of this is so obvious, and so clearly related to other New Testament texts, that is, to early Christian imagery and imagination, that it is disingenuous to characterise such a suggestion as lacking coherence or of being context free. Paul writes of being baptised into the death of Christ so that we might be raised with him (Romans 6.3-5, Colossians 2.12) as well as talking elsewhere about the life of Christ which he now lives (Galatians 2.20). 2 Peter 3.21, although not mentioning dying, does connect baptism with the resurrection. The context in which Mark was writing was the early Church, and allusions between death, resurrection and baptism abound. It is certainly true that the shedding of clothing makes for an arresting and vivid scene in Mark 14. But the context actually suggests more. In Mark 16, the young man is found sitting in the tomb, dressed in his best clothes. This is not a place of death, but it is the place of resurrection. Given the imagery used by the early Church, this is the obvious place for a baptised person to be. In Mark 14, at the last possible moment in the narrative before Jesus' death, the young man is stripped. It is very probable that this is the same young man, literal or literary, in both instances, linked by the imagery of a baptismal rite.

On the question of whether Mark's church used the symbolism of stripping naked before being baptised and then robed in white garments, the fact of having no written evidence for this is a question that is unnecessarily distracting. Asking the question the other way around is just as logical. Namely, do we, in Mark's gospel, have indications of what the liturgical practices of Baptism were in Mark's Church? If they had certain rituals associated with Baptism, it is not unreasonable to think that such rituals may at least be hinted at in the text. Given that the abandoning of old clothing and the taking of new clothing is certainly a symbol made use of in extant early baptismal liturgies, it is likely that this is reflected in the presentation of the young man in Mark 14 and 16.

A piece of recurring symbolism in Mark relating to clothing should also be noted, although in noting it, it does nothing to change the analysis suggested. Alan Culpepper points out the recurring use of the term ἱμάτια, "garments".[17] Culpepper lists a number of occurrences of this word: Jesus uses it as an analogy, saying that no one will attempt to patch a garment using a new (unshrunken) piece of cloth (2.21). Jesus' garments mediate his healing power (5.27-30 and 6.56). Jesus' garments are part of his transfiguration (9.3). Bartimaeus casts his garment aside after being healed, and shortly afterwards, others spread their garments before Jesus (10.50 and 11.7-8). Disciples will not return for a garment they have left behind when the eschaton comes (13.16). Lastly, the soldiers cast lots for Jesus' garments (15.20-24).[18] There is very likely to be repeated symbolism being employed here, but it is not related to the young man in Mark 14 or 16 as a different word is used for clothing, as Culpepper points out.[19] It is σινδόνα in Mark 14.51-52 and στολὴν in Mark 16.5; I will return to the meanings of these words below. Culpepper toys with the idea that the garment left behind by Bartimaeus is associated with baptismal liturgy, but rejects it without any particular reason, simply saying that "in

[16] Robin Scroggs and Kent Groff, "Baptism in Mark: Dying and Rising with Christ" in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92:4 (1973), 531-48, 536-40.

[17] R. Alan Culpepper, "Mark 10.50: Why Mention the Garment?" in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101:1 (1982), 131-132.

[18] Ibid., 132.

[19] Ibid.

my judgement the gospel itself does not warrant such an interpretation".[20] Culpepper is almost certainly right in this assertion. Although it is tempting to see baptism in every cast-off garment, there is simply not enough around the story to warrant such an interpretation. Casting off garments, or having them changed in some way, may indicate a move from an old life to a new life, in much the same way as the disciples leaving their nets and their boats indicates in Mark 1.18. However, that is not the same as suggesting such imagery is about baptism *per se*. That words other than ἱμάτια, "garments" are used for the clothing in the two scenes of the young man and the link to death and resurrection is so much stronger in those, indicate that when ἱμάτια is used, it does not have baptismal overtones.

Be this as it may, returning to Mark 16, there is the possibility that within potential references to baptism by way of the young man in the tomb, there are also liturgical elements contained in his words to the women. In Mark's text, after a preamble to show that he knows for whom the women are looking, the young man says to the women ἠγέρθη οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε, "He is risen! He is not here!" (Mark 16.6). Luke and Matthew both have slight variations on this theme. They frequently rewrite Mark, so this is not a surprise in itself. Matthew has οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε ἠγέρθη γὰρ καθὼς εἶπεν, "He is not here! He has risen as he said" (Matthew 28.6). Luke has οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε ἀλλὰ ἠγέρθη, "He is not here but is risen!" (Luke 24.6). It may only be a function of the greater simplicity of Mark's text, but it may be that the proclamation of "He is risen!" in a single word (ἠγέρθη) with which the young man begins his explanation is itself borrowed from a liturgical setting. It is certainly the case that where Matthew and Luke have edited the text, the simple proclamation has morphed into fuller sentences, different in each text. This makes sense if they have missed, lost, or chosen to edit out the liturgical context of their source material, which is what they have done, if it is indeed there in Mark. In the context of baptism, such a proclamation as is made in Mark 16.6 makes great sense. It is impossible to say when such a liturgical affirmation might have been used. Maybe it was used in baptisms, or maybe it was simply a response made Sunday-by-Sunday as the resurrection was recalled, but, because of the connection between baptism and death and resurrection, a shout of resurrection is clearly relatable to baptismal imagery. In short, the way that Mark presents the young man's phrasing may derive from a liturgical celebration. This tentative suggestion, and it can be no more than this, itself finds support in the use of Mark in early enactments of the Easter drama. Christine Joynes records how in the early Church it is Mark's text that was used more than that of the other Evangelists for this purpose.[21] This is not to claim that there is a direct link between the liturgy of Mark's community and that of some centuries later, but rather to suggest that since liturgical reenactment was easily drawn from this text, then this could well be because liturgy was one of its sources. It cannot be said with any degree of certainty, but it is a distinct possibility that the shout of resurrection in Mark 16 was part of the Sunday/Easter/Baptismal liturgies of Mark's community.

Lastly, and most important of all, there is one more link with baptism that can be gleaned from the meaning of the two words used for clothing in Mark 14.51-52 and 16.5. This link is far clearer from within the text itself than any suggestion about liturgical connections with the text. It will be recalled that rather than Mark's usual word for clothing, ἱμάτια, Mark uses σινδόνα in 14.51 and 52 (once in each verse) and στολὴν in 16.5. The latter of these words is used to indicate a "robe" of the best quality. It is, for example, used five times in Revelation 6 and 7 to mean distinguished robes. Mark also uses it at 12.38 to describe those who look as if they are good, upright people (in their robes) but are actually hypocritical. On the other hand, σινδόνα,

[20] Ibid.

[21] Christine E. Joynes, "The Sound of Silence: Interpreting Mark 16:1–8 through the Centuries" in *Interpretation* 65:1 (2011), 18-29, 22ff.

the word used in Mark 14.51 and 52 is usually translated in Bibles to imply some sort of undergarment, worn next to the skin, or even merely a loincloth. However, there is a more specific meaning of σινδόνα. Including the two occurrences in Mark 14, this word only occurs six times in the New Testament. Four of these occasions are in Mark, with one occurrence in each of Matthew and Luke. In Mark 15.46, where it is used twice, in Matthew 27.59 and in Luke 23.53, it is the word used for the burial shroud of the dead body of Jesus. Given the noun's limited use in the New Testament, given that Mark usually uses another word for clothing and has here chosen an unusual word, and given the other connections that imply a link to baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus, the use of σινδόνα for the clothing of the young man is surely of significance.

It is true that whereas Jesus is clothed in a σιν δόνα for his burial, at 14.52, the young man has even this garment taken from him. However, in 14.51, he is said to be following or accompanying Jesus περιβεβλημένος σινδόνα ἐπι γυμνοῦ, "having cast a cloth [σινδόνα] about his naked [body]". Thus, although he does indeed flee naked, he has already chosen to don this cloth/undergarment/burial shroud, prior to having it removed from him. This greatly supports the overall suggestion that the young man is representing a movement through the baptismal rite. He can now not only be seen as stripping and then re-clothing, and not only as being reclothed in the place of resurrection, but also as specifically entering into the death of Jesus via the decision to don a σινδόνα.

While some have rejected the notion that baptism could have influenced the imagery in Mark 14.51-52 and Mark 16.1-8, especially Mark 16.5, Robin Scroggs and Kent Groff were on the right lines in their article half a century ago. Building on this article, I have added to their conclusions the tentative idea that there are other signs of Mark 16 being associated with a liturgical celebration and, more concretely, the idea that the young man in Mark 14 is deliberately presented as donning a funeral shroud. It seems far more likely than not that this young man and his attire in Mark 14 and 16 stands for the entry into the death and resurrection of Christ that is offered by Baptism.

Conclusion

The editorial work on Mark's text performed by both Matthew and Luke strongly suggest that they understood Mark's text to imply that the figure in the tomb was a human being. The way in which Matthew simply cut the verses altogether and replaced them with a clear example of an angel shows that he wanted heavenly intervention to be an unambiguous feature of the text at this point, and strongly suggests that he did not see this in Mark. Luke too has edited Mark to make for a heavenly intervention, rather than a human one. True, he has kept the idea of some appearance of 'men', probably for intertextual reasons, but the "two men" are also unambiguously angelic. The white robe of Mark's text is transformed into dazzling brilliance, the women fall on their faces, and the two are cited as angels later in chapter 24. Matthew and Luke did not have 2000 years of tradition of there being an angel in the tomb, and they will have read Mark with clear eyes. Where the text said νεανίσκος, "young man", they understood exactly that: a young human being, and they have edited accordingly to make this figure into an angel or angels.

In contrast with Matthew and Luke, Mark's "young man" was intended to be precisely as stated, a young human being. From Matthew and Luke, readers expect the figure at the tomb to be angelic, but Mark was written first and if we did not have Matthew and Luke to influence our reading of Mark, then a modern reader would have no question at all about this figure being a human. There is no indication from within the text of Mark that the figure is anything else. Following the lead of Robin Scroggs and Kent Groff, it seems overwhelmingly probable that there is a reference to baptism being made here. Evidence added to their analysis has

come in two forms, first, a tentative suggestion of a liturgical origin for some of Mark 16 and second, a link with baptismal rites in the words chosen by Mark for clothing in chapter 14 and 16. In Mark 14, as the young man puts on clothing that can be understood as an undergarment or as a burial shroud, he represents being baptised into the death of Christ. Then, as in early baptismal rituals, the young man is stripped naked. Later, at the place of resurrection in Mark 16, he sits in his best, white clothing, a distinguished robe, mirroring the new clothing put on by those newly baptised into what was both the death and resurrection of Jesus. The young man's species is human, and he offers us an allegory of baptism.

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