The earliest written Gospel did not spring from the pen of a single writer. “Mark” is composed from materials that had been used before, some emerging first in Aramaic, and then in Greek, while others began life in Greek. Because he composed his work for hearers already familiar with the sources involved, the composition of the Gospel represented a communal interaction between composer and audience in a principally oral environment of communication.

We cannot say with certainty when Aramaic traditions were translated into Greek, or when oral traditions were first consigned to writing, that is, whether before Mark or only with Mark. But we can say that Mark, like Luke (1:2), was informed by at least “servants of the word,” and perhaps by “eyewitnesses,” if we follow as representative of the process Papias’ claim (reported by Eusebius, History 3.39.15) that Peter was a major informant.

Any knowledge of Mark’s informants comes by way of inference, by assessing the material they handed on to be incorporated within the Gospel. Sometimes, we are aided in this evaluation by the existence of Aramaisms in the text, which might indicate when an Aramaic tradition has been taken up by Mark, whenever it was initially translated. But other criteria are at least equally important: instances where possible tradents (such as Peter) are named or their identities alluded to, the alignment of interests signaled in the New Testament with those of a known tradent, and signal changes of scene or style as passage flows after passage.

These principles guide the isolation of sources here, with an indication at each heading of a scholar who advanced the understanding of each source. There is no reason to believe that any of the sources was in Aramaic at the time of usage by Mark. More likely, translation into Greek had already occurred, a factor that would help explain stylistic variation in Mark. Familiarity with

* Presented as a series of lectures at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2011, the first published form of this article appeared as “La plate-forme de travail de Marc et le caractère achevé de son œuvre,” in Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses 91.4 (2011), pp. 481–506. The editor, Christian Grappe, made several improvements during the course of translation that are incorporated here, along with other adjustments. Jacob Neusner’s influence is manifest in the conception and approach.
sources in Greek on the part of his audience would also account for the inclusion by Mark of materials not in accord with his overall stance.

When Aramaic retroversions are offered here, four further principles are followed. I look for indications that the Greek text points to its Aramaic original, for example by referring to an Aramaic speaker or presenting interrupted grammar. Second, retroversion must be into Aramaic of the first century, as attested by discoveries at or near Qumran, not into later dialects or Syriac. Third, attention should be paid to the resulting rhythm of retroversion, to see whether elements of Aramaic poetry might be recovered. Fourth and finally, retroversion should in some way offer a better understanding of the Greek text of Mark than would otherwise be possible. The retroversions suggested here are only a sample from a more comprehensive project and are offered to indicate that each of the sources incorporated within Mark was at least in touch with Aramaic traditions and may at some stage have circulated in Aramaic.

The Petrine Source and Its Logic (Following the Lead of C.H. Dodd)

The opening of Mark’s Gospel draws attention to itself as an *arkhe*, the primordial moment of departure; it focuses initially on John the Baptist, and only then on Jesus in his baptism. This becomes the basis of Jesus’ preaching and his proclaiming the Kingdom (Mark 1:14–15) and of healing Peter’s mother-in-law and countless others (vv. 29–38). That spinal development of the opening coincides with the bare outline attributed to Peter when he spoke in the house of Cornelius in Acts (Acts 10:34–38).

Within this tradition, when John speaks (Mark 1:7–8) and when Jesus is baptized (Mark 1:11), the wording—when retroverted into Aramaic of the first century—follows a consistent rhythm (counted by the siglum “/”) evident neither in Mark’s Greek nor in translation:

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1 See *A Comparative Handbook to the Gospel of Mark: Comparisons with Pseudepigrapha, the Qumran Scrolls, and Rabbinic Literature: The New Testament Gospels in their Judaic Contexts* 1 (Bruce Chilton, General Editor, with Darrell Bock, Associate Editor; Daniel M. Gurtner, Editor for the Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, and Philo; Jacob Neusner, Editor for Rabbinic Literature; Lawrence H. Schiffman, Editor for the Literature of Qumran, Daniel Oden; Leiden: Brill, 2010). A preface (pp. 48–60) sets out a fuller form of the principles of retroversion stated here, with bibliography. More recently, a presentation to the International Organization of Targumic Studies has appeared as “Greek Testament, Aramaic Targums, and Questions of Comparison,” in *Aramaic Studies* 11.2 (2013).