

PAPYRUS EGERTON 2 AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL*

John W. Pryor

In his Presidential Address to the SNTS in August, 1986,¹ Professor Raymond Brown noted a trend in recent scholarly research: the challenging of the canonical gospels by appeal to other extant documents. In particular, Brown entered into a critical review of the work of J. D. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*,² concentrating on the latter's claim that "Peter" represents tradition earlier than that found in the canonical gospels. With considerable audacity, one more Presidential Address is going to enter the debate over the relation between the canonical gospels and other written traditions.

In 1935 H. I. Bell and T. C. Skeat published critical notes on three fragmentary papyrus leaves of a Greek codex which contained sayings, miracle stories and controversies of Jesus.³ Known as Papyrus Egerton 2 (or Unknown Gospel = UG), their exact provenance is unknown, though they were discovered in Egypt.⁴ At first, UG provoked a lot of scholarly interest, including a doctoral dissertation by Goro Mayeda.⁵ Thereafter, interest subsided somewhat until recent years, when a number of scholars have revived interest in the document and its relation to the canonical gospels.⁶

*The Presidential Address delivered to the Fellowship for Biblical Studies, Melbourne, 1988.

¹"The *Gospel of Peter* and Canonical Gospel Authority", *NTS* 33 (1987) 321-343.

²J. D. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985). Crossan has followed up this work with a subsequent study, *The Cross that Spoke* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988) in which he claims that the passion and resurrection narratives of the canonical gospels are radical revisions of an earlier gospel account, reflected in the Gospel of Peter.

³H. I. Bell and T. C. Skeat, *Fragments of an Unknown Gospel* (London: British Museum, 1935).

⁴That is, they were bought in Egypt in 1934 from a dealer. Their exact origin is thus subject to speculation.

⁵Goro Mayeda, *Das Leben-Jesu-Fragment Papyrus Egerton 2 und seine Stellung in der urchristlichen Literaturgeschichte* (Bern: Haupt, 1946).

⁶H. Koester, "Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels", *HTR* 73 (1980) 119-126; D. F. Wright, "Apocryphal Gospels: the 'Unknown Gospel' (Pap.

In this paper, our particular interest is in the relationship between UG and the Fourth Gospel, for which, over the years, three explanations have been presented.

(i) The 4G used UG as one of its sources.⁷ The proponents of this position have argued their case on the basis of stylistic criteria: the Johannine elements appear to be more naturally located in UG than in 4G. I shall take up this matter later. It needs to be borne in mind that acceptance of such a position would not demand a dating of 4G much later than 100 AD, for UG, which Bell and Skeat dated “not very far from the middle of the second century”,⁸ appears to be but a copy of an earlier text. Dodd demonstrates the possibility of this when he discusses the address “*didaskale Iēsou*” (lines 33, 45).⁹ The term is an attempt to express the concept “Rabbi Jesus”, out of recognition that Jesus was known as a rabbi. But “Rabbi Jesus” does not correspond with contemporary Jewish usage. However, after 70 AD eminent teachers were referred to as “R. Jochanan”, “R. Eliezer” etc., but not as a form of address, which remained simply “Rabbi”. Egerton would therefore appear to have arisen some time after the fall of the Temple in a circle unfamiliar with the precise details of Jewish custom. Further confirmation is offered by Bell and Skeat who suggested that the lack of doctrinal bias and the use of both “Jesus” and “Lord” in the narrative, indicate a date 80-120 AD for the original composition.¹⁰

(ii) UG was written independently of any of the canonical gospels. Incidents and terminology common to them lead back to independent use of oral traditions.¹¹

Egerton 2) and the Gospel of Peter”, in D. Wenham (ed) *Gospel Perspectives: the Jesus Tradition outside the Gospels* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984) 207-232; F. Neiryneck, “Papyrus Egerton 2 and the Healing of the Leper”, *ETL* 61 (1985) 153-160.

⁷So Bell and Skeat 34-38; and Koester. It is noteworthy that Koester has chosen to ignore completely Dodd’s earlier article which presents forceful arguments to the contrary.

⁸H. I. Bell and T. C. Skeat, *The New Gospel Fragments* (London: British Museum, 1935) 10.

⁹C. H. Dodd, “A New Gospel”, in *New Testament Studies* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1953) 21. The article originally appeared in *BJRL* in 1936.

¹⁰Bell and Skeat, *New Gospel Fragments* 19.

¹¹Goro Mayeda; also R. Cameron, *The Other Gospels* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 73.

(iii) UG was written in dependence on the 4G, quoting it either from memory or, less likely, copying from it.¹²

Before we can look at John and UG, we need first to clarify the synoptics-UG relationship.

A. UG AND THE SYNOPTICS

UG has similarities to two synoptic incidents, lines 32-41 to the cleansing of the leper in Mark 1:40-44 et par., and lines 43-59 to the tribute money incident in Mark 12:13-17 et par. Though it is not my intention to undertake a detailed study of the pericopes, the following comments are in order:

1. Frag 1 recto has elements of two pericopes, the break occurring at line 31. Lines 22-31 tell of an attempt by certain people (perhaps *archontes* is the correct restoration of line 25) to seize Jesus. The language is thoroughly Johannine.¹³ I would suggest that these lines represent the conclusion to the dispute between Jesus and the *archontes tou laou* (116) in Frag 1 verso. That is to say, the fragment which we have and which gives evidence of 21 lines of text on the verso side is the lower part of the leaf with perhaps only one or two lines missing.¹⁴ A new pericope begins on line 32 with *kai idou lepros proselthōn auto legei*. This construction is distinctive of the synoptics and is never found in John. However, in the synoptics it begins a pericope very rarely (Matt 19:16, Luke 2:25, 10:25). Indeed, it can plausibly be argued that in the first two examples the *kai idou* serves to link the verse with what precedes and was never the start of an isolated pericope.¹⁵ Normally *kai idou* is preceded by an introductory statement which sets the scene of the action.¹⁶ This would indicate that whatever the source of UG, synoptic tradition or independent tradition, the redactor of the text has himself deliberately linked the start of the incident with the movement of Jesus at the end of the previous one.

What all of this editorial activity points to is that in spite of the strongly Johannine "flavour" of lines 1-31, the author of UG is writing a

¹²F.-M. Braun, *Jean le Théologien* (3 vols; Paris: Gabalda, 1959-66) I. 91-94; H. I. Bell, *Recent Discoveries of Biblical Papyri* (Oxford, 1937) 17—overturning his earlier judgement; J. Jeremias, *Unknown Sayings of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1957) 18-20, 93-94; Dodd, "A New Gospel".

¹³See Dodd 27-31 for a precise demonstration of this point. See also the later discussion of lines 22-31 in this paper.

¹⁴Crossan, 70, agrees with this conjecture.

¹⁵Note that Matt 19:16 is very similar to UG 32.

¹⁶Matt 9:2,20; 12:10; 17:3; 28:2,9; Luke 5:12; 7:12,37; 9:38; 13:11; 14:2; 19:2.

gospel much more in the style of the synoptics: relatively short pericopes consisting of conflict stories, healings and the like, at least some of which were carefully knit together into a flowing narrative. We lack the evidence to decide whether UG has any plot development, though lines 28-29 may point to this.

2. Lines 32-41 contain the story of an encounter between a leper and Jesus. There certainly are features which resemble the narrative in Mark 1:40-44 et par. Some of the parallels are exact: *ean thelēs* is common to the synoptics, and UG (which adds *su*), as is *thelō katharisthēti*. Other phrases and words in the narrative agree with only one of the synoptics, or are very similar. Thus, while lines 39-41 have a synoptic "flavour", they in fact agree with none of the accounts (though see Luke 17:14 in the ten lepers incident). The language of the pericope shows affinity with no one of the synoptic accounts.¹⁷

In fact, the differences from the synoptics are more noteworthy than the points of contact. The leper at no time pays homage to Jesus, a factor present in all synoptic accounts (Mark 1:40 et par., Luke 17:16); there is no reference to Jesus' extending his hand to touch the leper; Jesus is addressed as *didaskale Iēsou*, a title distinctive to UG; the account tells of the man's social contact with other lepers, the cause of his contracting the disease. We cannot tell whether the charge to keep silence, which in the synoptics precedes the dismissal to the priests, is lacking from UG, as Dodd believes, or was present in the missing lines.

It is hard to agree with Wright (supported independently by F. Neiryck¹⁸), that these differences from the synoptics do not argue for UG's independence from them.¹⁹ As noted, the narrative is verbally closer to none of the synoptics in preference to the others, and all of the synoptic similarities are such as could be expected to exist even in divergent traditions. The core of the incident is the man's expectation and Jesus'

¹⁷Dodd, 33-34, has listed the synoptic similarities.

¹⁸In a recent article, "Papyrus Egerton 2 and the Healing of the Leper", *ETL* 61 (1985) 153-160, F. Neiryck debates a recent claim by M.-E. Boismard (see his *Synopse*, vol. 2, 101-105) that apart from lines 33-36 (= proto-Matthean additions), the Egerton account is more archaic than the synoptic story of the healing of the leper (Mark 1:40-45 par.). Neiryck has no trouble in demonstrating a common Lukan vocabulary between lines 33-36 and the rest of the story, which leaves no real justification for the Boismard theory. But in the process, Neiryck is less convincing in arguing that the author "probably had some acquaintance with the three synoptic gospels and almost certainly with Luke" (159). His arguments are not persuasive and do not overthrow the case here presented.

¹⁹Wright 217.

response, and this is where the accounts are closest. It is inherently more likely that here we are confronted with independent living tradition.

3. The tribute money incident (lines 43-59) has been evaluated differently by several scholars. Crossan suggests that it puts us in touch with a tradition more primitive than Mark. Thus, whereas UG has a quote from Isa 29:13 as part of Jesus' accusation against his inquirers, a quote which he applies to himself, Mark has relocated it to 7:6-7 as part of his treatment about Pharisaic human tradition. And here Mark has the quote referring to God.²⁰ But Crossan's reasoning here is particularly curious. The introductory "Well did Isaiah prophesy ..." is found only here in the gospel tradition (Acts 28:25b is dependent on Mark, as is the Matthean parallel), and this is a sign that Mark has taken it from UG! Moreover, while both UG and Mark omit from Isaiah the phrase "with their mouth", in UG's case this is because in lines 52-53 he makes allusion to it in Jesus' words. Mark, however, has no good cause for omitting the phrase, and this also demonstrates he is dependent on UG! The force of this logic escapes me completely. I would have thought it more likely that with Isa 29:13 originally referring to Yahweh as speaker, the context in Mark 7 is more suitably pre-Easter, and that in UG more suitably post-Easter in location. It is after Easter that the church begins the practice of applying to Christ sayings of God in the OT. As to Crossan's second point, it simply does not follow that the absence of the phrase in Mark's quote supports his case. This presupposes that early Christianity was normally faithful to the text of the OT when quoting it, a presumption that is demonstrably false. Furthermore, as Wright asks, can Crossan say that "well did ..." is characteristic of UG since it is found there only once also? And may not Mark 7:37, 12:28,32 be partial parallels to the phrase?²¹

An opposite view is held by David Wright, namely that there is an *a priori* probability that UG is dependent entirely on elements in the canonical gospels, a probability he is inclined strongly to favour.²² The main problem is that elements in the pericope are scattered in the gospels, as follows:

lines 45-47: John 3:2

48-50: Mark 12:14 et par.

²⁰Crossan 83-85.

²¹D. F. Wright, "Four Other Gospels: review article", *Themelios* 12 (1987) 57. Wright further comments that Crossan has failed to notice the omission of "with/in their mouth" from the LXX of Codices Aleph and A, thus indicating a textual variant which may have influenced Mark's tradition. But this is not a strong point, as the tradition in Aleph and A may have itself been influenced by the gospel citation.

²²Wright, "Apocryphal Gospels", 217-219.

50-51: cf. Mark 1:43—*embrimēsamenos* in the leper incident

52-54: Luke 6:46

54-59: Mark 7:6 (= Isa 29:13)

It is Wright's belief that this collection of scattered verses in no way weakens the case for canonical dependence. What he claims is that they are associated by link words triggered in the memory of the author of UG as he recollected the gospel stories.

For example, the introduction to the question *didaskale oidamen hoti* (Mark 12:14 par.) is similar enough to John 3:2 (*rabbi oidamen hoti .. didaskalos*) to explain how the latter came to be prefaced to UG's version of the tribute money exchange. (Would it be far-fetched to remark on the similarity between what follows *hoti*—i.e., *alēthēs* in Matthew and Mark, *apo theou elēluthas* in John? Note that *apo theou* is reconstructed in UG line 45.) As the pericope develops, *didaskalon* recurs, *stomati* is picked up by *cheilesin* (some MSS of Is 29:13 LXX and Matt 15:8 have both *stomati* and *cheilesin*), and perhaps *eprophēteusen* recalls *prophētās* in line 47.²³

While the case for catchword connections is not implausible, it is weakened by the following observations:

(i) The supposed parallel which Wright draws with lines 1-31, where Johannine verses appear to be so connected, fails to reckon with the difference that in the latter case the quotations from 4G are far more exact. As we shall suggest below, UG's use of 4G can hardly be ascribed to vague reminiscence alone, but seems to demand quotation from the text itself. Such can hardly be the case for the tribute money incident, where UG's allegiance to synoptic traditions is not at all strong. Nor are the recollections from 4G in lines 1-31 as random as they appear to be in 43-59.

(ii) Catchword association cannot explain every case. Thus, Jesus' question in 52-54, parallel to Luke 6:46 can hardly be explained as derived from Luke to link with the ascription *didaskale Iēsou*, for in Luke Jesus uses *kurie*. Nor is there any obvious reason to change from the Lukan "do what I say" to something ("hear"?) else, especially since *poiein* has already been used in line 46, thus providing a second natural linkword. I believe it is equally likely that at some stage in the oral tradition prior to the writing of UG, the question and Isaiah quote response of Jesus were added to the tribute money confrontation. All of this happened under the influence of the favoured ascription of Jesus as *didaskalos Iēsous*. These

²³Wright, "Apocryphal Gospels", 218.

lines were added to the pericope before the (missing) answer of Jesus to the question.

Other factors support the contention that this incident is independent of the gospels. There seems no reason for the change from *Kaisari* to *basileusin*. Supporting the case for independent tradition is the comment of Crossan: “*basileus* was often used for the Roman Emperor in the eastern provinces so this could easily be a specific reference to Roman imperial taxation even without the name Caesar being used”.²⁴ Indeed, apart from the repetition in the question, there is little similarity to the Markan (or synoptic) version of the question. Again, Dodd’s listing of vocabulary shows that “nothing but the barest minimum of words is common to the canonical Gospels and the papyrus”²⁵. Finally, Wright’s claim that Jesus’ words in lines 52-54 look odd in that Jesus has not yet given any teaching to obey or disobey²⁶ does not carry much weight for we do not have much of what went before in the codex. It is not at all impossible that the author (or even the tradition) could be thinking of teaching of Jesus already given (or presumed to have been given).

4. Finally, we need to take note of Dodd’s detailed analysis of the vocabulary of UG in relation to that of the canonical gospels.²⁷ His analysis revealed that UG has “a much closer affinity with the Lucan writings than with the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark and John”. This unassailable conclusion must be evaluated alongside two other considerations: (i) the narratives in UG do *not* bear any close resemblance to Luke’s incidents; (ii) Luke’s style and vocabulary are the most “literary” of all four gospels. All these factors would suggest that the literary affinities between UG and Luke are purely co-incidental, the result of the closeness of cultural background between the two writers rather than of direct literary relationship.

I would conclude this brief study by affirming the position of Dodd and Mayeda:²⁸ there is no established literary relation between UG and the synoptic gospels. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that UG has drawn on independent oral traditions which bear some resemblances to known synoptic accounts. I would have no confidence at all in the claim

²⁴Crossan 79.

²⁵Dodd 37.

²⁶Wright, “Apocryphal Gospels”, 217, repeated in “Four Other Gospels”, 57.

²⁷Dodd 37.

²⁸Mayeda’s work was not available to me, but it was reviewed at length by H. I. Bell in *HTR* 42 (1949) 53-63.

of Jeremias that the “author (of UG) knew all and every of the canonical Gospels”.²⁹

B. UG AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Frag 1 verso and a segment of Frag 1 recto contain lines which are thoroughly Johannine in character. The opening lines of the fragment are too obscure and fractured to be reconstructed with any certainty, but what is known bears no relation to any part of 4G. At line 5 the text becomes more secure: an editorial comment paves the way for words of Jesus which are close to words in 4G. We can make the following observations about lines 1-20.

(i) In editorial comments, UG has no close contact with 4G. Thus, lines 5-7 are only superficially Johannine: *tou laou* is never used after *archontes*; *ton logon touton* is found in John (6:60; 7:36; 10:19; 19:8; 21:23, but it is also found in Matthew (x 3), Mark (x 1) and Luke (x 3); and the construction *strapheis* + indic. verb is more Lukan (x 8) than Johannine (x 2).

(ii) Lines 7-10 are very close to 5:39. The closeness is even more marked when one recognizes that in the fragment there is a conspicuous space after *echein*. The translation thus becomes: “Search the scriptures, the ones in which you think you have life. They it is which bear witness to me”. This corresponds to the variant Western text as represented by a, b and Sy^{cu}.³⁰ Even the absence of “eternal” is paralleled in one element of the doublet in a.

(iii) The second saying has two differences to 5:45. Instead of *katēgorēsō* UG has *ēlthōn katēgorēsai*, and it has added *mou* after *patera*. The second is of no consequence. The first variation is not a Johannine construction but is common in the synoptic tradition and presumably in the oral traditions. However, *erchomai* is a very common verb in 4G (x 155) and many of these occurrences bear the theological sense of the coming of Jesus/the Son for his divine mission. It is not at all unlikely that the author of UG has modified the text of John 5:45 under the (unconscious?) influence of both these factors.

(iv) The third quote, derived from John 9:29, is modified to suit the direct address from the rulers to Jesus. It also has replaced *hemēis* before

²⁹In E. Hennecke (ed), *New Testament Apocrypha* (2 vols; London: Lutterworth, 1963-65) I.95.

³⁰The text of a reads “scrutate scripturas in quibus vos existimatis in illis vitam aeternam habere illae sunt quae testimonium dicunt de me in quibus putatis vos vitam habere hae sunt quae de me testificantur”. See the comment on this doublet in Bell’s review of Mayeda, *HTR* 42 (1949) 55-56.

oidamen with (presumably) *su*. Neither of these changes is of great significance when weighed along with the exact verbal sequence followed by UG.

(v) Lines 18-19, words of Jesus, are not the same as any saying in 4G, but they may be an attempt to summarize the sense of John 5:46-47 with their reference to lack of belief in the testimony of Moses.³¹

How shall we evaluate this evidence? I believe that the closeness of word order on three occasions eliminates as an option the possibility that 4G and UG are independently using common oral tradition.³² Either John is dependent on UG or the reverse is the case. The issue will be resolved by reflecting on two questions: whether the language of the fragment is more characteristic of John or of UG, and whether the sequence of verses fits more naturally in UG than in their separated contexts in 4G. As to the first criterion, the more objective one, I believe Dodd has demonstrated conclusively that the vocabulary and style are thoroughly Johannine but they are not characteristic of the rest of UG.³³ Dodd's case has been ignored by those who, like Koester and Crossan, would argue the opposite conclusion, and even by Mayeda who opts for independence. But aspects of style and language in Frag 1 are characteristic of John, for example *marturoun, ekeinos estin* + substantive participle, *estin* + substantive participle. One would have to suppose that the author of 4G has so imbibed the style of this tradition that it has become his own. The second criterion is admittedly more subjective, and here again Dodd, Wright, Braun, and Bell (in 1937) line up against earlier Bell and Skeat (1935), Mayeda, Koester, and Crossan. Again, however, I cannot but feel that the sequence in UG is not as natural as we at first feel, and that had we no knowledge of the discourses in 4G we would be somewhat puzzled. In the first saying, Jesus exhorts his antagonists to search the scriptures to find divine witness to his own person and actions. But then, in line 10, Moses (i.e. the Torah) is appealed to for a quite different purpose: to condemn the rulers. The third verse is even more removed from the flow of the "argument", for the rulers' response does not quite make sense. The question of Jesus' origins have not been the subject of debate, nor has the authority of Moses been questioned, and yet both of these are implied in lines 15-17. In John 5 and 9 the verses do fit their context. It very much looks as though the author of UG, in constructing this conflict

³¹So Dodd 28.

³²See the article by J. Bradshaw, "Oral Transmission and Human Memory", *ET* 92 (1981) 303-307, for a valuable discussion of the neurological limitations of and tendencies in memorization and the implications for studies in the gospel tradition.

³³Dodd 24-25.

situation, has drawn upon verses known to him in 4G and which in his memory are linked by conceptual (scriptures-Moses) or verbal (Moses-Moses) associations.

Lines 22-31 also are Johannine in style and content. Though the first lines are obscure,³⁴ the general sense is quite clear: the rulers try to lay hands on Jesus to hand him over to the people. This occurs after they attempted to stone him. As earlier mentioned, these lines should be thought of as the conclusion to the incident in lines 1-21. As to Johannine style, *lithazein*, *piazein*, and *elēluthei autou hē hōra* are all demonstrations of this point.³⁵ The synoptics know of no attempt to stone Jesus. And though lines 22-31 have no exact parallel in the 4G, they do bear resemblance to several situations described—7:30-44, 8:31-39 and 8:59. The closest synoptic verse is Luke's comment at the end of the Nazareth incident in 4:30: *autos de dielthōn dia mesou autōn eporeueto*. The strongest evidence that these lines are a conflation of Johannine elements has to do with the role of the crowd: presuming that *paradōsōsin* is correct (lines 26-27), we may well ask why the rulers want to hand Jesus over to the crowd. If the crowd desired to seize Jesus they could have done it themselves. Such a confusion does not enter the Johannine accounts, and we may be left to suggest that UG has modified the Johannine presentation in the light of the general Jewish hostility to Christianity at the beginning of the second century.

How shall we assess the relation to 4G revealed in lines 1-31? Firstly, we must say that though the incident is so decidedly Johannine in content and style,³⁶ the author of UG has constructed a narrative that is synoptic-like in structure. He is not interested in presenting Johannine discourses but in portraying a conflict incident in Jesus' ministry. Secondly, I have suggested that UG betrays a conscious dependence on 4G. But is the dependence from memory or is it literary? Scholars tend

³⁴Bell and Skeat in their two works in 1935 first suggested *ochlō* in line 5 but then revised their recommendation to *helkōsin* in the second work.

³⁵But the addition of *tēs paradōseōs* interprets the hour of Jesus in a quite unjohannine way: instead of being the hour of his glorification, it is now the time of his arrest (cf. Luke 22:53). What this indicates is that though the author of UG may have known the 4G and respected it, he has not really understood its deeper theological insights. His thinking on the ministry of Jesus is still fashioned by what he knows from the synoptic-like oral tradition.

³⁶Wright has convincingly demonstrated, against Koester and Jeremias (*New Testament Apocrypha*, 1.95), that the few synoptic features do not demand synoptic-type traditions here. See "Apocryphal Gospels", 213-215.

to suggest that memory alone is at work here.³⁷ But memory and *slavish* literary dependence are not the only two options. It is possible that the author in rather freely constructing his incident is consciously drawing upon Johannine material alone, and that for certain sayings he conforms almost verbatim to a known text.³⁸ That, of course, leads to the obvious question: why is he at times so free and at other times so controlled by the text? Here we can only guess at an answer. Perhaps he feels less liberty to tamper with the words of Jesus than with narrative details. Thirdly, apart from lines 45-47 to which we are about to turn, UG displays no tendency to mix Johannine and other traditions. We simply cannot say, with Jeremias, that “the Johannine material is shot through with Synoptic phrases and the Synoptic with Johannine usage ...”³⁹ The only other possible Johannine fragment is Frag 3 recto, but its evidence is so minimal that we cannot conclude anything definite from it. There is a reasonable chance that it is the tail end of a saying of Jesus (“I and the Father *are one*”) with a consequent attempt again to stone Jesus. If so, then it is a recollection of John 10:30-31 with *apokteinōsin* instead of *lithasōsin*.⁴⁰

C. JOHN 3:2 AND UG

In the light of the above, what are we to make of lines 45-47 which remind us so much of John 3:2? In view of what I have concluded, it would be foolish to deny that the author was mindful of John 3:2 as he wrote these lines. But is it a total fabrication adapted from 4G for the occasion? This would be a possibility were we to have suggested, with Wright, that the whole pericope is a blend of synoptic and Johannine elements and nothing more. But such is not my advice, but rather that the incident derives from oral tradition independent of the synoptics. That being so, the pericope as UG knew it must have had some flattering introductory words similar to what we have in UG and in the synoptic accounts. As we address this problem, we can with reasonable confidence make the following assertions:

(i) Nowhere else has UG blended synoptic and Johannine elements. This raises the possibility that this has happened here only because the Johannine and the oral traditions were quite close anyway.

³⁷Thus Wright, “Apocryphal Gospels”, 214, Braun 1.92, Jeremias *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1.95.

³⁸Though Dodd does not take up the question of memory as opposed to literary dependence, his silence leads me to suspect that he may well have thought along similar lines to me.

³⁹Jeremias, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1.95.

⁴⁰So Dodd 85, Wright, “Apocryphal Gospels”, 219.

(ii) If the author of UG only had John 3:2, it is unlikely he would have modified the verse so much. In Frag 1 sayings of both Jesus and the rulers more faithfully reflect the text of John. Here the change from *rabbi* in 3:2 to *didaskale Iēsou* may be thought natural in the light of both the equivalence of *rabbi* and *didaskalos* and also the seeming preference of UG for this title (line 33). But equally, the difference may be traced back to the oral tradition behind UG, for it is noteworthy that Mark 12:14 et par. also begins with *didaskale*. Moreover, we must bear in mind that if Jesus' response in lines 52-53, with its conclusion of *didaskalon*, is integral to the tradition, then it demands that the opening salutation contain *didaskale*. The last phrase of the address is also unjohannine: *huper* + accus. is not found in 4G (though see 12:43); and while John does occasionally refer to "prophets" (1:45; 6:45; 8:52,53), he never speaks of "all the prophets" (x 3 in Luke). We need also to remember that *marturei* is far from certain as only the "m" is clearly visible. It is not impossible that the reading was something like *meizona estin*.⁴¹

(iii) We may presume that *oidamen hoti* was present in the non-Johannine traditional introduction to the story. It is found also in the synoptic version. Had these words not been present in the original oral form of the saying, it is difficult to imagine what would have prompted the author of UG to think of John 3:2.⁴²

All of these considerations drive me to the conclusion that the form of the introductory remark in the tradition known to the author/compiler of UG must have included the following: "Teacher Jesus, we know that ... for ... more than all the prophets". Beyond that we cannot go, for it looks as though Egerton's knowledge of John 3:2 has shaped his words, without its being his only or primary source.⁴³

CONCLUSION

We cannot have any confidence that the synoptic gospels are either known to or treated with respect by the author of UG. There is a much stronger case for supposing total ignorance of the synoptics, so that synoptic-like incidents derive from living oral tradition. Otherwise we are

⁴¹If line length makes this reconstruction an impossibility, the general point being argued is not thereby weakened.

⁴²Here I disagree with Wright. See the passage from Wright quoted earlier, with my comments.

⁴³If this is correct, the implications for the pre-literary form of the Nicodemus story may be considerable: was it originally, like the tribute incident in the synoptics and Egerton, a controversy story?

left with a document which treats the 4G source far more conservatively than the various synoptic sources.

John's Gospel, on the other hand, is known to the author of UG, and he clearly respects it as providing authoritative guidance on the person and mission of Christ. But he does not feel that it is an untouchable holy book. On the contrary: as he writes up his own account of the incidents in Jesus' life, drawing largely from living oral tradition, he is also influenced, particularly in the recounting of sayings of Jesus, by what he knows from John, and he makes careful yet liberal use of it. He is thus a witness to the early Egyptian knowledge and reception of 4G in what we can only presume are "ordinary" Christian circles.⁴⁴

UG is a witness to one other facet of early Christianity, the collecting of gospel units into a consecutive narrative similar to the synoptic style and pattern (Luke 1:1). We have no knowledge of what kind of literature it represents, whether there is a beginning to Jesus' ministry and whether it contained a passion narrative. My own suspicions, in the light of the mention of "his hour" (1:29) and of the Jewish opposition which is so strong, is that there may well have been plot development and even a passion narrative. This would make the synoptics and UG to be independent witnesses to the same trajectory. But this can ever remain nothing more than speculation.⁴⁵

⁴⁴That is, the document betrays no gnostic or other distinctive tendencies. So also Braun 1.94, Dodd 45,51.

⁴⁵Such speculation has recently been furthered by D. Wright, who suggests for consideration the hypothesis that the Gospel of Peter and UG are one and the same document. Discussion of Wright's article is outside the scope of this paper, as is also the question of the precise intention of the gospel. See D. F. Wright, "Papyrus Egerton 2 (the Unknown Gospel)—Part of the Gospel of Peter?" *The Second Century* 5 (1985-86) 129-150.