Was John the Baptist Raised from the Dead? The Origins of Mark 6:14-29

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Abstract: In the vox populi of Mark 6:14-16 (cf. 8:28), we find the puzzling claim that some believed Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. The presentation of John in the Gospel is similar to Jesus: Mark depicts John as a prophetic figure who is arrested, executed, buried by his disciples, and—according to some—raised from the dead. This paper reviews scholarship on the question of whether the tradition concerning John's resurrection—as well as the tradition concerning his death to which it is prefixed (6:17-29)—originated outside of the early Christian community. We examine the possibility that sects or individuals in the ancient world believed John had indeed been raised from the dead—as well as figures supposedly connected to John (Dositheus, Simon Magus). We conclude on the basis of internal evidence from the Gospel that the report in 6:14-16 likely originated in a Christian context. At the same time, it may also provide a glimpse into first-century CE attitudes concerning the resurrection from the dead.

Keywords: Gospel of Mark; Resurrection; John the Baptist; Historical Jesus; Second Temple Judaism; Samaritan Studies

The Gospel of Mark tells the story of a prophetic figure, who comes to fulfil the Jewish scriptures. The prophet preaches repentance, draws large crowds and gathers disciples. He also encounters resistance, as his enemies plot his death and twist the will of a weak ruler to have him arrested and then executed. Afterwards, his disciples take his body and lay it in a tomb. This is how Mark describes John the Baptist.[1] After introducing John with a citation attributed to Isaiah (1:2-3), Mark describes his ministry of repentance and forgiveness of sins at the Jordan (1:4-8), writing of the large crowds from all over Judea who flocked

1 For a useful overview of the parallels between Jesus and John, see D. C. Allison Jr., *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2005) 226. The unknown author(s) of the Gospel will hereafter be referred to as "Mark" for convenience.

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to hear John's preaching and receive his baptism. Following this, Mark simply notes that John was arrested (1:14), and he slips out of view, only to reappear one last time in chapter six. Here we learn that John's ministry was dramatically cut short when the tetrarch Herod Antipas ordered his arrest and beheading to satisfy his wife, Herodias, who had a long-standing grudge against John (6:17-29).

This story is appended to Mark's report of popular opinion concerning Jesus. The growing fame of Jesus stirred speculation—who was he? What gave him the power to perform miracles?[2] Mark gives us the lay of the land: some believed Jesus was the great miracle-worker, Elijah (v. 15a), who was supposed to return before the last days (cf. Mal 4:5; Sir. 48:10). Others believed he was comparable to "one of the prophets of old" (v. 15b). But before these, Mark mentions an unusual theory: "Some were saying, 'John the baptizer has been raised (ἐγήγερται) from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him'" (v. 14). Clearly, Mark did not subscribe to this view, but he mentions someone who did: "But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised (ἠγέρθη)'" (v. 16).

The *vox populi* in Mark 6:14-16 raises several questions: does the report concerning John refer to a resurrection (e.g. 16:6), or something else?[3] If it does refer to a resurrection does that mean there was a resurrection tradition concerning John prior to that of Jesus? And if the report does not belong to history, then who was responsible for its creation?

1. The meaning of the claim

First, it would help to establish what the claim "Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead" means. Mark appears to think it implies that Jesus is the same person as John the Baptist. The second *vox populi* in 8:27-30 confirms this: Jesus asks, "'Who do people say that I am?' And [the disciples] answer him, 'John the Baptist'".[4] But this interpretation faces one significant obstacle: Jesus was alive

2 This follows a number of other passages where those outside Jesus' circle recognize his ability to perform miracles and/or exorcisms (Mark 3:22 and parallels; John 11:47). Elsewhere Mark attributes Jesus' fame to his ability to perform miracles (Mark 1:28, 45; 3:7-8; 5:27; 6:14,54-56).

3 Mark uses two verbs for the act of "rising" from the dead: ἐγείρω (see 12:26; 14:28; 16:6; also 5:41) and ἀνίστημι (n. ἀνάστασις; see 5:42; 8:31; 9:9-10,31; 10:34; 12:18,23,25). W. Wink asserts that ἀνάστασις refers to resurrection whereas ἐγείρω refers to resuscitation, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (SNTSMS 7; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1968) 10. To the contrary, in Mark the terms are closely related and refer to the same action in more than one place (5:41-42; 12:18-26). For a detailed analysis of the use of ἐγείρω and ἀνίστημι to indicate a return to life, see J. G. Cook, *Empty Tomb, Apotheosis, Resurrection* (WUNT 410; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2018) 13-37.

4 So R. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross, Chapters 1-8* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2000) 314-316.

before John's death. In other words, Jesus and John were clearly two different people. On this basis, it would be physically impossible for Jesus to be John raised from the dead and presumably at least some in the crowds were in a position to know this.[5]

Some take this to mean that the claim in 6:14 must not refer to resurrection given the impossibility of the claim—perhaps it is instead best understood as reincarnation or simply a figure of speech.[6] But this assumes logical consistency on behalf of Mark's crowds, whereas Mark often attributes false opinions to the crowds, as when bystanders misconstrue Jesus' cry from the cross as an invocation of Elijah (15:35).[7] Closer to home, the present chapter begins with Jesus mistaken for merely being a carpenter (6:1-6). It could be that Jesus was perpetually misrecognized—or, as is more likely, that the motif of Jesus' mistaken identity was important to Mark's literary and theological design (8:27-33; cf. 4:10-12).[8]

That the claim in 6:14 is non-sensical, then, is not on its own sufficient grounds for dismissing the notion that it refers to a resurrection. So, are there any other possibilities as to its meaning?

5 See the comments in J. E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1997) 294. Even if Jesus was supposed to have come after John's time (as 1:14 implies), the fact remains that Jesus (one must assume) differed in appearance to John, who was a public figure, making the equation of the two figures difficult to maintain. Cf. Kraemer, who argues that Mark implies the impossibility of John's resurrection on account of his beheading, since "the whereabouts of his head, given to Herodias, are unknown". See R. S. Kraemer, "Implicating Herodias and Her Daughter in the Death of John the Baptizer: A (Christian) Theological Strategy?", *JBL* 125 (2006) 321-349 (343 [n. 62]). To the contrary, we are not aware of tradition stipulating that beheaded persons could not be resurrected. Contrast this with Rev 20:4, which mentions persons who have been beheaded (πελεκίζω) who are said to come alive (ζάω) with Christ. The comment of Antipas in Luke 9:7, "John I beheaded etc." (Ἰωάννην ἐγὼ ἀπεκεφάλισα) is best seen as expressing skepticism towards resurrection, not the resurrection of a beheaded person *per se*.

6 Some have followed Grotius' assessment that the claim must refer to reincarnation, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* (Groningen: Zuidema 1827) II, 2-4; see A. E. Harvey, "'They Discussed Among Themselves What This "Rising from the Dead" Could Mean' (Mark 9.10)", *Resurrection: Essays in Honour of Leslie Houlden* (ed. S. Barton – G. Stanton) (London: SPCK 1994) 69-78 (69); B. M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary* (JSNTSupp 164; London: A&C Black 1998) 219-220; J. Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (AncB 27; New York, NY: Doubleday 2002) 399; cf. D. R. Catchpole, *Resurrection People: Studies in the Resurrection Narratives of the Gospels* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys 2002) 142; N. C. McClelland, "Elijah/Elias", *Encyclopedia of Reincarnation and Karma* (ed. McClelland) (Jefferson, NC: McFarland 2010) 84-85. For those who interpret the claim as a figure of speech, see nn. 8-10.

7 On Mark's complicated portrait of the (often fallible) crowds, see E. S. Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2000) 70-99, esp. 92-96.

8 On the importance of this motif in Mark 1:14-8:26, see J. D. Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress 1983) 80-88.

2. Alternative explanations

Some argue that the claim is better understood in relation to contemporary magical practices. For Morton Smith, the claim indicates that Jesus was thought to have been possessed by the spirit of John the Baptist and that is why powers were at work in him.[9] Smith compares this to the later claim of Christian polemicists that Simon Magus performed miracles using the spirit of a dead boy.[10] But elsewhere Mark has clear ways of referring to possession—consider 3:22, where the scribes claim, "He has (ἔχει) Beelzebel". Instead, Mark uses ἐγείρω which in similar contexts refers to a person being made alive again (e.g. 12:26).[11] More to the point, such a serious charge of necromancy does not fit the context of 6:14-16, where the claims that Jesus is Elijah or a prophet are positive albeit mistaken.

It may be, as some have suggested, the claim (perhaps best summarized as) "Jesus is John raised from the dead" was another way of saying that Jesus was John's successor.[12] The point was to ascribe a "sense of continuity"[13] between John and Jesus or say something to the effect of "This is John the Baptist all over again".[14] But elsewhere in the Gospel, Mark expresses the continuity between John and Jesus quite clearly by having John declare, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me" (1:7a).[15] One wonders why Mark would then adopt such a roundabout expression in 6:14. And if Mark merely intended to show that Jesus was *like* John, there were other ways to do this: in 6:15, the

9 M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row 1978) 33-35. See also C. H. Kraeling, "Was Jesus Accused of Necromancy?", *JBL* 59 (1940) 147-157; D. E. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity", *ANRW* II 23/2 (1980) 1507-1557 (1541-1542).

10 Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 98. The prevalence of necromancers in antiquity is suggested by Lactantius: "For if anyone desires to inquire further into the matter, let him assemble those who are skilled in calling forth spirits from the dead" (*Inst.*, 4.27 [ANF VII, 130])—many thanks to Prof. D. Shanzer for bringing this passage to our attention.

11 In some magical papyri, however, ἐγείρω appears to carry the meaning of "conjuring/raising" a demon from the underworld, see Cook, *Empty Tomb*, 33-34.

12 V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan ²1966) 309; M. D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Black's NT Commentaries; London: A&C Black 1991) 159; E. Schweizer, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (NTD 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1998) 70; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2002) 253; M. E. Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2006) 177; A. Y. Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia 55; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2007) 304; R. H. Stein, *Mark* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2008) 301; D. Bock, *Mark* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015) 207.

13 France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 253.

14 Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 309 (also at 83). Repeated in Stein, *Mark*, 301; cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 318.

15 Also at 1:14, see W. Marxsen, *Der Evangelist Markus: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums* (FRLANT 67; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1956) 22-24.

crowds say Jesus is like (ὡς) one of the prophets of old, and in 6:34, Jesus says the crowds are like (ὡς) sheep.

Perhaps the claim can be compared to Elisha succeeding Elijah.[16] Elijah does indeed receive Elijah's prophetic mantle and a double-portion of his spirit, so that the prophets declare, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha" (2 Kgs 2:15). But this does not lead to the conclusion that Elisha *is* Elijah, or Elijah raised from the dead. Elisha is also never mentioned in the Gospel of Mark. The simplest explanation is that the claim should be understood in its plain sense. Despite the unintelligibility of Jesus being the same person as John, the claim "John has been raised" likely means the same thing as when applied to Jesus: a person who was dead is no longer dead. The conclusion of the Baptist episode shows that Mark understood the claim as referring to resurrection from the dead. The placing of John in a tomb by his disciples in 6:29 forms an *inclusio* with 6:14, so that the reader knows that John has not been raised. Unlike Jesus, he remains entombed. The claim, then, "John has been raised (ἠγέρθη)" would appear no different from the claim in 16:6, "He [Jesus] has been raised (ἠγέρθη)".[17]

3. Was there a popular belief in John's resurrection?

Assuming this is the meaning of 6:14, is the report evidence of a popular belief in the resurrection of John prior to that of Jesus? Some stipulate that, before Jesus, resurrections were not thought to take place outside of the *eschaton*.[18] However, generalisations like this are rarely helpful and we simply do not know that the crowds—or Herod for that matter—held this belief. Nor is it certain the claim "John has been raised" was devoid of eschatological content.[19]

16 France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 253; Stein, *Mark*, 301. Cf. W. Roth who sees the identification of Jesus as Elisha to John as Elijah as the paradigm for the entire Gospel, *Hebrew Gospel: Cracking the Code of Mark* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 1988) 2 and *passim*.

17 In both contexts, ἠγέρθη can be read as either a passive ("has been raised") or intransitive middle ("is risen"; cf. Matt 8:15). However, in neither case is it clear the verb functions as a "divine passive", since, as Cook notes, "Unlike Paul, the Synoptic authors do not explicitly say that God or the Spirit raised Jesus" (*Empty Tomb*, 27, n. 152). Cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 318; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 207; J. R. Donahue – D. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (SP 2; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical 2005) 458; Stein, *Mark*, 302.

18 A view expressed by N. T. Wright, "But nobody imagined that any individuals had already been raised, or would be raised in advance of the great last day", *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 3; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2003) 205. Cf. the more complicated picture in Jewish texts in Cook, *Empty Tomb*, 455-569; and Greek and Latin texts in D. O. Endsjø, *Greek Resurrection Beliefs and the Success of Christianity* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan 2009) 47-52, 54-70; Cook, *Empty Tomb*, 144-223, 247-291.

19 Both claims in 6:15 appear to concern eschatological expectation ("Elijah", "one of the prophets"). Cf. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2010) 56, n. 111. Allison distinguishes the resurrection of Jesus

At first glance, Mark appears to be our only source for the claim that John was raised from the dead. But can we find signs of this belief anywhere else? Later Mandaean texts say that at his death, John (*Yaḥyā*) ascended to the place of light, but insist that his body remained on earth to decompose.[20] These same texts, however, seem either unaware or uninterested in the role of Herod Antipas in John's death, so their value for reconstructing first century events is questionable.[21]

The most relevant evidence does not concern John, but two of his disciples who were thought to have avoided death. The Samaritan Dositheus was supposedly a disciple of the Baptist.[22] According to Origen, he was thought by his followers to have survived death and was still alive somewhere.[23] Later Christian and Arabic writers claim that Dositheus died in a cave where his body was consumed by worms or dogs.[24] This may reflect the original narrative by which Dositheus' followers believed his body was resurrected or translated.[25]

Simon Magus, known to the New Testament (Acts 8:9-24), was also reputedly a disciple of John the Baptist.[26] Early Christian polemicists are aware of a tradition of Simon ascending to heaven, with each giving different explanations for why he failed to complete the act and died instead.[27] Hippolytus offers a different tradition, writing that Simon attempted to replicate Jesus' resurrection by

from other resurrections in the Gospels (including Mark 6:14-16) as they do not pertain to "eschatological existence" (i.e. eternal life). To the contrary, there is no sign that this idea is absent in 6:14-16, moreover the "powers . . . at work in [Jesus]" (ἐνεργοῦσιν αἱ δυνάμεις ἐν αὐτῷ) may be considered a feature of the eschatological age, so Lane: "The resurrection [of John] permitted the powers of the new age to be channeled through him" (*The Gospel of Mark*, 212).

20 *Ginza Rba* 5:4 (E. S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran: Their Cults, Customs, Magic Legends, and Folklore* [Oxford: Clarendon 1937 – Leiden: Brill 1962] 280).

21 So R. L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* (JSNTSupp 62; Sheffield: JSOT 1991) 44-45.

22 *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 2:23-24 (ANF VIII, 233); *Ps.Clem. Rec.* 2:8 (ANF VIII, 99).

23 Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 13:27 (PG 14, 416).

24 Epiphanius, *Pan.* 1.1.13 (F. Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book I (Sects 1-46)* [NHS 35; Leiden: Brill 1987] 36); and much later, Abu'l Fatḥ, *Kitāb al Tarīkh* 48 (P. Stenhouse, *The Kitāb al Tarīkh of Abu'l Fath: Translated into English with Notes* [Sydney: The Mandelbaum Trust 1985] 215).

25 S. Isser, *The Dositheans: A Samaritan Sect in Late Antiquity* (SJLA 17; Leiden: Brill 1976) 46, 97-98; J. E. Fossum, "Samaritan Sects and Movements", *The Samaritans* (ed. A. D. Crown) (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1989) 293-389 (320-323, 329). The assumption of Dositheus' body from a mountain cave may also reflect Samaritan traditions concerning Moses (*Mem. Mar.* 5.3-4 [J. Macdonald, *Memar Marqah: The Teaching of Marqah* (BZAW 83; Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töplemann 1963) I, 206-207]). Additionally, Isser (*The Dositheans*, 97, n. 146) notes the similarity of this tradition to the Thracian Zalmoxis mentioned by Herodotus (*Hist.* 4.94-96 [LCL CXVIII, II, 297]; cf. Strabo, *Geogr.* 7.3.5 [LCL XLIX, III, 187]), who withdrew to a cave for three years to prove his mastery over death.

26 *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 2:23 (ANF VIII, 233); *Ps.Clem. Rec.* 2:8 (ANF VIII, 99).

27 Arnobius, *Adv. nat.* 2.12 (PL 5, 828); *Acts of Peter* 23-32 (J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation based*

burying himself in the earth and rising after three days. But once again, he was unsuccessful in this endeavour, as Hippolytus writes, "[Simon] remained [in that grave] until this day, for he was not the Christ".[28] As with Dositheus, the Christian traditions may have been intended to counteract a Simonian claim concerning their leader's resurrection or translation to heaven.[29] But again, these sources are late and of questionable historical value for understanding Mark 6:14-16. They do, however, associate rising from the dead with the circle of John's followers, in which Jesus may have belonged.[30]

Returning to the New Testament, the other Gospels offer little additional information: Matthew makes a few alterations to Mark's account (Matt 14:1-10), so that now Herod alone believes Jesus is John raised from the dead, whereas Luke repeats the popular opinion, but does not ascribe the belief to Herod (Luke 9:7-9).[31] There is one possible reference, however, in the prophecy of the two witnesses in Rev 11:3-14. While the passage does not mention John, it speaks of two figures resembling Elijah and Moses, who are killed in Jerusalem, only to receive the spirit of life and be raised after three days (cf. Ezek 2:2). Matthew, of course, equates John with Elijah (Matt 11:14) and describes Jesus in terms reminiscent of Moses.[32] Perhaps the prophecy of the two witnesses preserves an early interpretation of the deaths of John and Jesus.[33] But there is no obvious sign the author of Rev 11:3-14 made this equation.[34] So, aside from Mark 6:14, there is no

on M. R. James [Oxford: Clarendon 1993] 416-423); *Acta Petri et Pauli* [ANF VIII, 484]; *Apost. Constit.* 2.9 (ANF VII, 453); cf. *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 2.32 (ANF VIII, 235).

28 Hippolytus, *Haer.* 6.20.3 (ANF V, 81).

29 Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (WUNT 36; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1985) 138-139.

30 See W. B. Badke, "Was Jesus a Disciple of John?", *EvQ* 62 (1990) 195-204; J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (ABRL; New York, NY: Doubleday 1994) 2, 116-130, 191-197; cf. J. Ernst, "War Jesus ein Schüler Johannes' des Täufers?", *Vom Urchristentum zu Jesus für Joachim Gnilka* (ed. H. Frankenmölle – K. Kertelge) (Freiburg: Herder 1989) 13-33.

31 Interestingly, Matthew substitutes the "yeast of Herod" (Mark 8:15) with the "yeast of the Sadducees" (Matt 16:6). Perhaps a similar substitution lies behind Luke's hesitation to attribute a belief in resurrection to Herod (cf. Matt 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27)—many thanks to V. Wittkowsky for this suggestion.

32 For many examples of the latter, see Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1993) 137-270.

33 For a survey of other interpretations of the identity of the two witnesses, see A. K. W. Siew, *The War Between the Two Beasts and the Two Witnesses: A Chiastic Reading of Revelation 11.1-14.5* (JSNTSupp 283; London: T&T Clark 2005) 215-249.

34 Indeed, the editorial comment in 11:8c (ὅπου καὶ ὁ κύριος αὐτῶν ἐσταυρώθη) would suggest the author did not identify one of the witnesses with Jesus. Elsewhere, the idea of biblical figures returning from heaven to "taste death" can be found in *LAB* 48:1, though, as R. Bauckham notes, there is no sign that this signifies martyrdom (cf. 4 Ezra 7:28-35), *The Jewish World Around the New Testament: Collected Essays I* (WUNT 233; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2008) 23.

clear evidence of a first-century belief that John was raised from the dead—or that Jesus was identified with the resurrected John. In the final analysis, we have no way of knowing whether the claim in 6:14 reflects popular belief.

4. Did Herod believe in John's resurrection?

The question of Herod is another matter. The claim in 6:16 is, of course, related to the narrative in vv. 17-29.[35] The historical plausibility of 6:16 therefore depends to some extent on the reliability of what follows. If Mark or his source had access to the inner-workings of the Herodian court, then the text might also preserve the historical opinions of Herod concerning John the Baptist. Here we can make some provisional historical comments. By the time of Mark's writing, Herod Antipas would have been dead (Josephus, *War* 2.183). So, how might Mark or his source have gathered this information? It may be the information comes from someone with intimate knowledge of Herod's private conversations—scholars have tentatively suggested some potential candidates, such as Joanna, who according to Luke was the "wife of Herod's steward" (Luke 8:3), or Manaen, an Antiochene Christian and member of the Herodian court (Acts 13:1).[36] But the text names no source for the claim except Herod.

Moreover, the following narrative does not suggest intimate knowledge of the Herodian court. The text calls Herod Antipas "king" (6:14,22,25-27) instead of "tetrarch"[37] and names Herodias' first husband Philip (6:17) instead of Herod (II)[38]—imprecisions that do not suggest first-hand information. It also reports

35 On the connection between vv. 14-16 and vv. 17-29, see R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (HTKNT; Freiburg, Herder 1976-1977) I, 332, 338-340; R. A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (WBC 34a; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson 1989) 327. In terms of narrative structure, Mark 6:14-16 functions as the "transition" to the "scene" in vv. 17-29, see P. L. Danove, *The End of Mark's Story: A Methodological Study* (BIS 3; Leiden: Brill 1993) 46.

36 H. W. Hoehner, *Herod Antipas: A Contemporary of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1980) 303-306.

37 For a list of sources indicating Antipas' title as tetrarch, see Gundry, *Mark*, 317. M. H. Jensen notes that every coin bearing his name addresses Antipas as "Herod the Tetrarch", though two inscriptions mention the royal title of his father, "Herod, the son of Herod the King, tetrarch" (Ἡρῴδην Ἡρῴδου τοῦ βασιλέως υἱόν τετράρχην), *Herod Antipas in Galilee: The Literary and Archaeological Sources on the Reign of Herod Antipas and its Socio-Economic Impact on Galilee* (WUNT 2/215; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2006) 209-210. Matthew and Luke substitute Mark's βασιλεύς with τετραάρχης (Matt 14:1; Luke 9:7). The instance of βασιλεύς in Matt 14:9 may simply be another case of editorial fatigue on Matthew's part (cf. 14:5), see M. Goodacre, "Fatigue in the Synoptics", *NTS* 44 (1998) 45-58 (46-47); cf. Hoehner, who sees in Matt 14:1,9 a distinction between the "technical" (τετραάρχης) and "popular" (βασιλεύς) titles for Antipas, *Herod Antipas*, 149-150.

38 As Meier notes, "To try to save Mark from a glaring historical error, Christian commentators have traditionally spoken of 'Herod Philip' (salvation by conflation), but such a Herodian poltergeist never existed outside the minds of conservative exegetes" (*A Marginal Jew*, II, 172).

Herod promising the young girl "even half of his kingdom" (6:23), when, as Joan Taylor notes, "Antipas did not, in fact, have a kingdom; he had a tetrarchy, and this was not really his to give away freely to his young stepdaughter".[39] What is more, the narrative is difficult to square with the sober account of Josephus (*Ant.* 18.116-119), with its emphasis on the political over the theatrical.[40] At the same time, Josephus arguably has a much more plausible link to the inner-workings of the Herodian court.[41]

Then there is the likelihood of the claim itself: are we to accept that Herod, with the investigative powers of the tetrarchy at his command, would have so easily believed that Jesus was John and had been raised? Perhaps Herod was so wracked with guilt over John's death that he jumped to this strange conclusion.[42] However, given the other historical issues with the rest of the episode, the simplest explanation is that 6:16 does not originate from within the Herodian court.

5. Who authored the tradition?

Who then is responsible for the claim "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead"? Again, we return to the episode of John's execution. If Mark is drawing on a non-Christian source—say, from the/a Baptist sect—then perhaps the

39 Taylor, *The Immerser*, 246-247; also Schweizer, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, 71. Cf. Hoehner (*Herod Antipas*, 151), who surmises that this was "a proverbial saying even in the days of Ahasuerus" (cf. 1 Kgs 13:8; Hom., *Il.* 9.616 [LCL CLXX, 438]; Luke 19:8) and "was not meant to be taken literally". The most relevant example in Luke 19:8, however, gives no indication that it was intended figuratively.

40 So R. Aus, *Water into Wine and the Beheading of John the Baptist* (BJS 150; Atlanta, GA: Scholars 1988) 73; G. Theissen, *Lokalkolorit und Zeitgeschichte in den Evangelien. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (NTOA 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1992) 86 (n. 54); M. Tilly, *Johannes der Täufer und die Biographie der Propheten: Die synoptische Täuferüberlieferung und das jüdische Prophetenbild zur Zeit des Täufers* (BWANT 137; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1994) 57; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, II, 175; Kraemer, "Implicating Herodias and Her Daughter in the Death of John the Baptizer", 323; Marcus, *John the Baptist in History and Theology* (Studies on Personalities of the New Testament; Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press 2018) 99. For a complimentary view of the two accounts, see C. A. Evans, "Josephus on John the Baptist and Other Jewish Prophets of Deliverance", *The Historical Jesus in Context* (ed. A.-J. Levine – Allison – J. D. Crossan) (Princeton Readings in Religions; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2006) 55-63; K. Backhaus, "Echoes from the Wilderness: The Historical John the Baptist", *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (ed. T. Holmén – S. E. Porter) (Leiden: Brill 2011) II, 1748-1785 (1780). However, Josephus' account of Antipas is not without its issues, see L. H. Feldman, "A Selective Critical Bibliography of Josephus", *Josephus, the Bible, and History* (ed. Feldman – G. Hata) (Leiden: Brill 1989) 330-448 (380). On the authenticity of *Ant.* 18.116-119, see J. P. Meier, "John the Baptist in Josephus: Philology and Exegesis", *JBL* 111 (1992) 225-237.

41 See the discussion in Jensen, *Herod Antipas in Galilee*, 68-100.

42 So Wink, *John the Baptist*, 11.

information concerning the resurrection of John comes from the same source.[43] Some go so far as to say the episode of John's execution exhibits no Christian influence.[44] The episode from vv. 17-29 is certainly unique in the Gospel in the sense that it is neither directly or indirectly concerned with Jesus.[45] At the same time, the episode introduces a host of new characters who do not re-appear in the Gospel.

But it also provides an important function within the Gospel. It explains the fate of John, which has been held in narrative suspension since 1:14. It also prefigures the suffering of the Son of Man, as interpreted in 9:11-13. Here the disciples ask Jesus concerning the coming of Elijah, and he answers that "Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him" (9:11). Jesus links this to his own suffering, "How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt?" (9:12).[46] While Jesus does not mention him explicitly, he clearly imagines John as Elijah. Jesus says that unnamed people "did to [Elijah] whatever they pleased (ἔθελον)" (9:13); in 6:19, we learn that Herodias "wanted" (ἤθελεν) to kill John, and in 6:25, the young girl says she "wants" (θέλω) John's head on a platter (cf. 6:22).[47] The narrative of 6:17-29—with its plotting enemies, summary arrest, grotesque miscarriage of justice, remorseful ruler, grisly execution and somber burial—then begins to take on a more Christian character. It becomes a prefigu-

43 Suggested by Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, I, 333-334. For the "Baptist sect" origins of 6:17-29, see R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. J. Marsh) (Oxford: Blackwell [2]1968) 301; Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, I, 343; Lane, *Mark*, 215; J. G. Crossley, "History from the Margins: The Death of John the Baptist", *Writing History, Constructing Religion* (ed. Crossley – C. Karner) (Aldershot: Ashgate 2005) 147-161 (157). Cf. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 326-327.

44 Bultmann, *Synoptic Tradition*, 301; echoed in Tilly, *Johannes der Täufer und die Biographie der Propheten*, 59.

45 Unless 1:4-8 is also to be considered an independent unit, so Stein, *Mark*, 298.

46 Cf. Bultmann, who argues the reference to the "Son of Man" may be an interpolation, *Synoptic Tradition*, 125; and M. Casey, who favours a circumlocution meaning "Like all men, Elijah must suffer", *Aramaic Sources for Mark's Gospel* (SNTS MS 102; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998) 111. To the contrary, there is no clear indication that the saying in 9:12 is any different from the statement in 9:9, where the subject is clearly Jesus. On problems with Mark's identification(s) of Elijah, see N. Vette, "Who is Elijah in the Gospel of Mark?", *Reading the Gospel of Mark in the Twenty-First Century: Method and Meaning* (ed. G. Van Oyen) (BETL 301; Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming).

47 E. Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista nelle Tradizioni sinottiche* (Studi Biblici 82; Brescia: Paideia Editrice 1988) 41-42. Compare this with Matthew, who reports that it was Herod, not Herodias, who desired (θέλω) to kill John (Matt 14:5). Now that Herod is the primary aggressor, the report of his grief (λυπέω) in 14:9 make less sense than it does in Mark 6:26, so Goodacre treats it as an example of editorial fatigue, "Fatigue in the Synoptics", 46-47. For the more aggressive portrait of Herod in Matthew when compared with Mark, see J. Rainbow, "John the Baptist, Elijah and Naboth: What Does 1 Kings 21 Have to do with Matthew 14?", *Searching the Scriptures: Studies in Context and Intertextuality* (ed. C. A. Evans – J. J. Johnston) (SSEJC 19; LNTS 543; London: T&T Clark 2015) 64-80 (72).

ration of the suffering of Jesus—with a twist, of course.[48] While in both cases, weak rulers, following the desires of the wicked, execute righteous men, John remains in the grave, whereas Jesus does not. In this way, John's execution also prefigures Jesus' resurrection.[49] This has an apologetic aim: when it comes to resurrection, Jesus is once again superior to John.[50]

Returning again to the claim at the outset of the narrative, that "Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead", here too there may be signs of Christian influence. We recall the rationale in 6:14, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him". What "powers" (δυνάμεις) are the crowds talking about? The preceding verses only speak of the disciples' miracles (6:7-13), so perhaps the δυνάμεις of 6:14 refer to the powers conferred upon the disciples by Jesus (6:7).[51] Alternatively, it may refer to the "deed/s of power" (δύναμις/δυνάμεις) performed by Jesus in the preceding chapters (6:2,5; also 5:30).[52] But in neither case are these powers said to result from a resurrection.[53] So, is there any precedent for miraculous powers stemming from resurrection?

In the extant literature of the period, miraculous powers do not tend to be a feature of post-resurrection life[54]—with the notable exception of Jesus. Early Christian literature speaks of Jesus becoming imbued with new powers at his res-

48 See the overview of similarities between the deaths of John and Jesus in C. Wolff, "Zur Bedeutung Johannes des Taufers im Markusevangeliums", *TLZ* 102 (1977) 857-865. See also J. Gnilka, "Das Martyrium Johannes' des Täufers (Mk 6,17-29)", *Orienterung an Jesus: zur Theologie der Synoptiker—Für Josef Schmid* (ed. N. Brox – W. Pesch) (Freiburg: Herder 1973) 78-93 (80-81); C. Karakolis, "Narrative Funktion und christologische Bedeutung der markinischen Erzählung vom Tod Johannes des Täufers (Mk 6:14-29)", *NovT* 52 (2010) 134-155. For verbal similarities, see C. Focant, "La tête du prophète sur un plat, ou, L'anti-repas d'alliance (Mc 6.14-29)", *NTS* 46 (2001) 334-353 (348). Cf. Tilly, who notes that „wesentliche inhaltliche Differenzen bestehen", *Johannes der Täufer und die Biographie der Propheten*, 59.

49 The classic study on this theme is S. J. Nortje, "John the Baptist and the Resurrection Traditions in the Gospels", *Neot.* 23 (1989) 349–358.

50 As with similar passages indicating the superiority of Jesus over John: Mark 1:7-8,10-11,14-15. Cf. Wright, who argues that early Christians would not be likely to invent a competing resurrection claim, since it would "compromise their belief in the decisive and world-changing nature of Jesus' resurrection" (*Resurrection*, 412).

51 The placing of the episode between two reports of the disciples' activity (6:13,30) is characteristic of Markan intercalation, and may suggest that the episode is designed to contribute to Mark's characterisation of the disciples, so F. Moloney, "Mark 6:6b-30: Mission, the Baptist, and Failure", *CBQ* 63 (2001) 647-663.

52 So Tilly, *Johannes der Täufer und die Biographie der Propheten*, 54-56.

53 No early tradition survives of John performing miracles, unless one interprets John 10:41 as a polemic against such a tradition. So Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray – R. W. N. Hoare – J. K. Riches) (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster 1971; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2014) 394, n. 4; cf. C. K. Rothschild, *Baptist Traditions and Q* (WUNT 190: Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2005) 9, n. 16.

54 So E. Haenchen, *Der Weg Jesu: Eine Erklärung des Markus-Evangeliums und der kanonischen Parallelen* (Berlin: Töpelmann 1966) 235. Cf. W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (THNT 2; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 1977) 170.

urrection. This ranges from more abstract "power" (δύναμις) (Rom 1:4; Phil 3:10; cf. 1 Cor 15:43) to new miraculous abilities including apparition (Luke 24:36; John 20:19,26), disapparition (Luke 24:31) and ascension (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9). This also seems to include a change in Jesus' appearance, so that his closest companions do not recognise him (Matt 28:16; Luke 24:16; John 20:14-15; 21:4). Perhaps the change in physical appearance from John to Jesus in Mark 6:14-16 is not so unexpected after all (cf. 1 Cor 15:51-52).

The powers in 6:14 may then be read as a sign of Christian influence. Unless, of course, there was a pre-existing resurrection tradition concerning John (or another figure) which had already reached the same conclusion: rising from the dead meant one attained new miraculous powers. Since there is no independent evidence of this at present, the claim—at least as it appears in 6:14-16—probably reflects Christian beliefs.

Can we go any further in identifying the author of the tradition in 6:17-29? Some argue that while the pericope may have Christian features, Mark is not the author of the tradition.[55] Whether the passage is Markan or not depends on how much flexibility one allows the literary figure of Mark. Scholars note that the text uses imperfect and aorist tenses, rather than the historic present characteristic to Mark.[56] Be that as it may, we note the present ἔξεστίν and ἔχειν in 6:18 and the present participle Βαπτίζοντος in 6:24. Moreover, elsewhere in Mark, a single verse (i.e. 6:7) can contain verbs in the present (προσκαλεῖται), aorist (ἤρξατο) and imperfect (ἐδίδου) tenses.[57] At the same time, the considerable verbal differences between the episode and the surrounding narrative could be explained by the fact that the story tells of events prior to Mark's main narrative, so one might expect a change of tense.[58] After all, John's fate has been suspended since 1:14. What is more, the narrative reflects a quick pace (6:25,27) with the use of "immediate" (εὐθέως) language, common to Mark. These could all be attributed to

55 So M. Dibelius, *Die urchristliche Überlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer* (FRLANT 15; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1911) 78-79; Aus, *Water into Wine*, 67-71; Theissen, *Lokalkolorit und Zeitgeschichte in den Evangelien*, 89, n. 62.

56 E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (KEK 1/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1937) 117-118; more recently Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 396.

57 Noted in C. Focant, *The Gospel According to Mark: A Commentary* (trans. L. R. Keylock) (Eugene: Pickwick, 2012) 232. Moreover, the story contains vocabulary found elsewhere in Mark: ἐγένετο (6:14) = 1:4; 1:9; 1:11; 2:23; 2:27; 4:4; 4:10; 4:22; 4:39; 5:16; 6:14; 9:3; 9:7; 9:26; 11:19; 12:11; 15:33; ἔλεγον (6:14) = 2:16; 2:24; 3:21; 3:22; 3:30; 4:41; 5:31; 6:14; 6:15: 6: 35; 11:5: 11:28; 14:2; 14:31; 14:70; 15:31; 15:35; ἀκούσας (6:16) = 10:47; 12:28; ἤθελεν (6:19) = 3:13; 6:48; 7:24; 9:30; ἀποκτεῖναι (6:19) = 3:4; ἠδύνατο (6:19) = 14:5; ἤκουεν (6:20) = 12:37; γενομένης (6:21) = 1:32; 4:17; 4:35; 6:35; 6:47; 14:17; 15:33; 15:42; θέλῃς (6:22) = 1:40; ᾐτήσατο (6:25) = 15:43; ἔδωκεν (6:28) = 2:26; 4:7; 11:28; 14:22; 14:23; ἀκούσαντες (6:29) = 3:31; 4:18; 10:41; 14:11; 15:35; ἦραν (6:29) = 6:43; 8:8; ἔθηκαν (6:29) = 16:6.

58 So F. Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1979) 131.

the editorial work of the Markan author[59]—but as they are, the verbal features of 6:17-29 are more than compatible with Markan authorship.

Others argue that the genre of the episode points to a non-Markan origin, calling the episode a "legend",[60] a "popular folk-tale",[61] a "court legend/novella"[62] and a "martyrdom".[63] However, the execution of John is not the only episode in the Gospel to embrace palace intrigue and theatricality, as the Passion Narrative amply shows (esp. 14:53-15:20)—an episode with which the execution of John the Baptist already shares many similarities. The Gospel also contains its fair share of self-contained narratives of a similar length, like the episode of the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20) or the Syrophoenician woman (7:24-30). It is possible that Mark inherited these common stylistic and structural features from his sources, but they may just as easily be attributed to the work of the same author (i.e. Mark).

Still others describe the episode as a pre-existing "midrash"[64] or "haggada",[65] noting the use of material from Esther in the narrative. Herod promises the young girl, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom" (ἕως ἡμίσους τῆς βασιλείας μου) (Mark 6:23b). This is the promise Ahasuerus repeatedly gives to Esther (LXX Est 5:3; 7:2: ἕως τοῦ ἡμίσους τῆς βασιλείας μου). The episode includes many other features reminiscent of Esther, often corresponding to the Greek text: the occasion of a banquet (Mark 6:21; cf. Est 2:18; 5:6; 7:2,7-8: δεῖπνον/משתה), the pleasing young girl (Mark 6:22; cf. LXX Est 2:9: κοράσιον . . . ἤρεσεν) and the execution that follows (Mark 6:23-28; cf. Est 7:3-10).[66] Roger Aus raises the possibility that the author may have also been influenced by traditions concerning Esther, including one where Ahasuerus orders the beheading of queen Vashti and her head is brought into the banquet on a platter (*Est. Rab.*

59 So Gundry, *Mark*, 312-313; cf. P. J. Achtemeier, *Jesus and the Miracle Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books 2008) 61.

60 Bultmann, *Synoptic Tradition*, 301.

61 H. Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark* (NCB; London: Oliphants 1976) 167.

62 Theissen, *Lokalkolorit und Zeitgeschichte in den Evangelien*, 85, n.53. See also the examples of this genre in D. R. Macdonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2000) 78, n. 6. Cf. the comments in A. Smith, "Tyranny Exposed: Mark's Typological Characterization of Herod Antipas (Mark 6:14-29)", *BI* 14 (2006) 259-293 (261, n. 9).

63 Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, I, 339; J. Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (EKKNT 2/1-2; Zürich: Benziger 1978-1979) I, 245-246; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 398 (cf. 404).

64 I. de la Potterie, "Mors Johannis Baptistae (Mc 6,17-29)", *VD* 44 (1966) 142-151 (147); Casey, "Prophetic Identity and Conflict in the Historic Ministry of Jesus", *Israel's God and Rebecca's Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal* (ed. D. B. Capes – A. D. DeConick – H. K. Bond – T. Miller) (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press 2007) 121-134 (126, n. 8).

65 J. Bowman, *The Gospel of Mark: The New Christian Jewish Passover Haggadah* (SPB 8; Leiden: Brill 1965) 154; Aus, *Water into Wine*, 68. Cf. Focant, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 247.

66 See Aus, *Water into Wine*, 39-74.

4.9,11)—though these sources likely post-date the Gospel. That the author incorporated some elements from the Esther legend into the episode, however, is almost certain.

That this demonstrates its non-Markan character is less clear.[67] Elsewhere, Mark weaves details from the Jewish scriptures into his narrative: take, for example, the use of the Elijah-Elisha cycle in the description of John the Baptist (1:6; cf. 2 Kgs 1:8), the sojourn of Jesus in the wilderness (Mark 1:13; cf. 1 Kgs 19:4-8; also 17:6), the call of the disciples (Mark 1:16-20; cf. 1 Kgs 19:19-21) and the two feeding miracles modelled on Elisha (Mark 6:35-44; par. 8:1-9; cf. 2 Kgs 2:42-44);[68] let alone the extensive use of material from the Psalms, Amos, Zechariah and Daniel in the Passion Narrative.[69] While this is the only time where Esther appears in the text, the compositional technique of weaving scriptural details into the narrative appears to be a feature of the Gospel.

6. Some tentative conclusions

So, as it stands, we can offer six tentative conclusions: first, the simplest explanation is that the claim in Mark 6:14-16 refers to a person who was dead being made alive again. Second, outside of Mark, there appears to be no contemporaneous evidence of a popular belief concerning John's resurrection. Third, the likelihood that Herod subscribed to this belief depends to some extent on the plausibility of the following narrative of John's execution. Fourth, the episode of John's execution shows some signs of Christian influence and appears to reflect the arrest, execution and burial of Jesus. Fifth, the claim that rising from the dead brings new miraculous powers makes the most sense in a Christian context. Sixth, the features of the episode are at least compatible with Markan authorship.

Together, these conclusions are just pieces of a larger puzzle. The conclusions of this study would seem to hint that the *vox populi* in 6:14-16 likely originated from within the early Christian community. Still, the possibility that some in the first century CE believed John had been raised from the dead cannot be dismissed lightly. We have shown that some supposedly in John's circle had resurrection or translation stories of their own—although these texts are late.

While Mark's survey of popular opinion seems to reflect some Christian ideas, he appears to have no problem attributing a belief in resurrection to the

67 Cf. Aus, *Water into Wine*, 71.

68 See the discussion of these passages in A. Winn, *Mark and the Elijah-Elisha Narrative: Considering the Practice of Greco-Roman Imitation in the Search for Markan Source Material* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2010) 72-112.

69 See the detailed discussion in K. S. O'Brien, *The Use of Scripture in the Markan Passion Narrative* (LNTS 384; London: T&T Clark 2010) 67-112.

masses—and not just them, but prominent figures like Herod Antipas. Although it is unlikely the crowds or Herod ever expressed a belief in John's resurrection as recorded in 6:14-16, Mark's presentation of popular opinion gives the impression that he thought claims of a person rising from the dead were not out of place in the world before Jesus.

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