WRITING AS A RHETORICAL ACT IN PLUTARCH
AND THE GOSPELS

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Introduction

This paper addresses an issue that is pertinent especially for interpretation of literature from antiquity which contains biographical dimensions. The phrase 'biographical dimensions' refers broadly to portrayal of a human being during the span of time from conception to afterlife. Much biblical literature falls within the purview of this discussion, as well as much non-biblical literature. Stories about individuals and sayings attributed to them played an important role in the transmission of culture in antiquity. These stories and sayings have come to us in written form, and here a major challenge arises. How shall we understand the act of writing which produced the story or saying as it comes to us? Or, more importantly, what kinds of acts of writing do we consider possible, and what kind dominates our attention?

From Textual Criticism to Rhetorical Criticism

When interpreters began to develop literary-historical methods of analysis during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, settings in which scribes copied and recopied manuscripts guided this analysis. Scribal copying produced 'errors' and 'corruptions' through accidental omissions or additions, or through intentional revisions to improve the text.¹ The major goal for this analysis was to construct the earliest

version of the text available to us on the basis of extant manuscripts. By the beginning of the 20th century, a significant number of 'critical texts', that is, texts constructed out of critically established early readings, were available to the scholarly community.

Once textual criticism had shown its worth and produced 'better', in the sense of 'earlier' texts, the same literary-historical skills that were attained and refined through textual criticism were applied to reconstructing written sources used by the writers of the earliest texts. This step invited greater creativity than textual criticism, but the literary-historical procedures of textual criticism provided the basic tools for the analysis. Much as textual criticism negotiated different readings in manuscripts to reconstruct the earliest text, so source criticism negotiated different readings to reconstruct written sources used by one or more authors. In other words, the literary-historical skills that had been learned to reconstruct 'early texts' simply were extended to reconstruct 'early sources'.

Analysis especially of stories and sayings in the Gospels invited the extension of the literary-historical skills associated with text and source criticism yet one more step, namely to the reconstruction of 'oral sources'. One might think that biblical scholars used significantly different methods of analysis during the era of form criticism, but perusal of form-critical investigations reveals that no significant break with the literary-historical procedures of text and source criticism occurred. The major shift was to concentrate on the 'life' of individual pericopae. The methods for reconstructing the life-stages of these stories and sayings were the same literary-historical methods used for text and source criticism. In other words, the analytical steps in form criticism proceeded as though oral transmission and variation occurred in a manner analogous to 'scribal' transmission and variation.¹

Redaction criticism, in contrast to form criticism, has opened the door for interpretive skills significantly different from the literary-historical skills that were formulated to reconstruct written and oral sources of a text on the basis of intertextual similarities and differences. To be sure, most interpreters in Europe stay within the bound-

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aries of the literary-historical skills of text, source, and form criticism as they use redaction criticism to envision the theological and historical situation of the Gospels.¹ Yet through the influence of interpreters like Norman Perrin redaction criticism in the United States has from the beginning emphasized the ‘whole range of creative activities’ in a Gospel.² This emphasis has given redaction criticism an open-ended agenda that invites interaction with various kinds of structural, literary, and rhetorical modes of analysis.

One of the renewed interests during the transitional period provided by redaction criticism has been the relation of oral to written speech, and in the midst of the discussion a new problem has arisen. The problem is that a discussion of ‘print culture’ appropriate for our time has been imposed onto the first centuries of the common era in such a manner that the relation between oral and written culture during early Christian times is badly misconstrued. Werner Kelber’s discussion not only typifies the problem but contributes a major voice to the confusion. The confusion arises through a failure to recognize the pervasiveness of rhetorical culture throughout Mediterranean society during the Hellenistic period.³ Kelber distinguishes between ‘oral culture’, ‘scribal culture’, and ‘print culture’, placing an improper mystique on scribal culture using Elizabeth Eisenstein’s statement:

There is nothing analogous in our experience or in that of any living creature within the Western world at present. The conditions of scribal culture thus have to be artificially reconstructed by recourse to history books and reference guides. Yet for the most part, these works are more likely to conceal than to reveal the object of such a search. Scribal themes are carried forward, post-print trends are traced backward in a manner that makes it difficult to envisage the existence of a distinct literary culture based on hand-copying. There is not even an agreed-upon term in common use which designates the system of written communications that prevailed before print.⁴

A major problem with this manner of stating the issue is the lack of reference to rhetorical culture in Mediterranean antiquity. The system of communication that prevailed before print, and during the first phase of print, was called 'rhetoric'. For this reason it would be more helpful for us to distinguish between:

1. oral culture
2. scribal culture
3. rhetorical culture
4. print culture

New Testament documents were produced in a culture characterized by interaction among oral, scribal, and rhetorical environments. The phrase 'oral culture' should be used for those environments where written literature is not in view.¹ The phrase 'rhetorical culture', in contrast, should refer to environments where oral and written speech interact closely with one another.² It would be best to limit 'scribal culture' to those environments where a primary goal is to 'copy' either oral statements or written texts. Hand-copying in Mediterranean antiquity produced a distinct literary culture in an advanced rhetorical culture where written and spoken composition were closely related to one another.

If we are to be true to writing activity in antiquity, we must be aware of a spectrum of various kinds of writing.³ This paper focuses on scribal reproduction and progymnastic composition. 'Scribal reproduction' consisted of making copies of extant texts, transcribing messages and letters from dictation, and reproducing stock documents like receipts. A person received training in these skills during the elementary and grammatical phases of education.⁴ 'Progymnastic composition', in contrast to scribal reproduction, consisted of writing traditional materials clearly and persuasively rather than in the oral or

3. The primary spectrum of writing in Mediterranean antiquity, in our view, consists of five kinds of writing: (1) scribal reproduction; (2) progymnastic composition; (3) narrative composition; (4) discursive composition; (5) poetic composition.
written form it came to the writer. The full spectrum of progymnastic composition is outlined and discussed in documents entitled *Progymnasmata* (Elementary Exercises), and we recommend the phrase 'progymnastic rhetoric' to refer to the phenomenon and the phrase 'progymnastic composition' to refer to the writing activities associated with it. Progymnastic composition was intended for the end of grammatical training in preparation for rhetorical training, but there were disagreements during the early centuries of the common era concerning how much grammatical training a student needed to complete before beginning to compose at the progymnastic level. A major thesis of this paper is that progymnastic composition is the activity that bridges the gap between the kind of rhetorical analysis performed by people like George A. Kennedy, in whose honor this volume of studies is offered, and text, source, form, and redaction analysis.

In order to display the nature of progymnastic composition and to distinguish it from scribal reproduction, this paper exhibits multiple versions of Lysander's use of his sword to discuss territorial boundaries, Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law, Jesus' calling of two sets of brothers, Alexander's refusal to run in the Olympic footrace, and the woman who touched Jesus' garment. The documents entitled *Progymnasmata* which were written by Aelius Theon of Alexandria (c. 50–100 AD) and Hermogenes (2nd cent. AD) will serve as guides for analysis of these short units in Plutarch and the Synoptic Gospels.

Recitation Composition in Traditional Rhetorical Culture

In traditional rhetorical culture, repetition of words and phrases in a written document regularly is the result of 'recitation composition' rather than 'copying'. Aelius Theon explains recitation composition in the following manner:


2. Quintilian, in *Institutio Oratoria*, especially book 1, refers to some of these discussions and clarifies his position in the midst of them.

and so 1) 'Recitation' (ἀναγγελία) is obvious. For we try to the best of our ability to report (ἐρμηνεύσατι) the assigned chreia very clearly in the same words or in others as well.¹

When Theon refers to 'reporting' a chreia (a statement or action attributed to a specific person), he is talking about writing it. A traditional rhetorical culture is based on stories and sayings that people use in different ways for different purposes. Recitation composition in Hellenistic education built on this insight and, as a result, marked the transition from scribal copying to rhetorical writing. The dynamics and presuppositions surrounding recitation composition emerged as a teacher recited a traditional fable, anecdote, event, or saying in his own words to one or more students and the students wrote the brief unit in their own words, using as much or as little of the teacher's wording as worked well for them. It is not accidental that the recitation exercise marked the transition from scribal copying to rhetorical writing, since once a student moves away from verbatim reproduction of an oral or written text, the dynamics of rhetorical culture invade the act of writing itself. John Dominic Crossan has seen the variations that result from recitation composition in his study of early Christian aphorisms, and he refers to them as 'performancial variations'.² Unfortunately, as an heir of literary-historical criticism, he does not use insights from rhetorical criticism or information about different kinds of writing during the Hellenistic period to inform the analysis.

Since recitation composition stands at the entrance to rhetorical culture as it functioned in Mediterranean society, writing and speaking are closely intertwined in much Mediterranean literature. The customary introductory phrase 'it is said' (λέγεται), 'they say' or 'they were saying' (λέγουσιν or ἔλεγον), or some such variation, exhibits the pervasive nature of recitation in the culture. When people transferred material from one written document to another, they regularly performed the material anew. The new performance contained as much or as little verbatim reproduction as was congenial to the writer. An author attributed specific words to specific past authors, and this act produced arguments from ancient authorities or witnesses. The result appears in references to specific people like Xenophon, Homer, Isaiah, or David; and authors regularly refer to these citations through

‘according to’ (κατά with accusative) or some form of reference to something ‘written’ (γέγραπται, ἐστίν γεγραμμένον, etc.). As a result of recitation composition, even specific citations often exhibit variation rather than verbatim transmission.

The dynamic relation between oral speech and written literature is evident from the opening discussion in the Progymnasmata of the first-century rhetorician and sophist Aelius Theon. Theon tells his reader that the only way to become a skillful orator is to ‘write every day’:

For those who are going to be orators, not the words of the older writers, not their wealth of thoughts, not the purity of their style, not their well-proportioned arrangement, not their elegant oral presentation, in a word, not any of the good elements in rhetoric, are at all useful unless each one practices writing every day for himself.¹

For Theon, a primary dimension in practicing writing every day is learning to present something well in varying ways. As Theon says:

For thinking is stirred by one subject in not just one way (so that the sense impression falling upon it is conveyed the same way), but rather in several ways. And since we sometimes make statements, sometimes ask questions, sometimes make inquiry, sometimes express a wish, and sometimes express our thought in some other way, nothing prevents our expressing the same impression equally well in all these ways.²

Writing in a rhetorical culture builds on speaking and writing from the past, and the goal is to learn to present the thoughts and actions of the past equally well in varying ways.

The issue is, then, where is the line to be drawn between scribal reproduction, which includes ‘corrections and improvements’, and recitation composition? Many Gospel units that have been discussed from the perspective of scribal revision are more appropriately described as different recitation performances. Since the person thinks the sounds, and perhaps says them during the writing, written speech remains closely related to oral speech. The person hears the words, and the sounds influence the written form. If we wonder why the Synoptic Gospels contain so much variation in settings of so much verbatim agreement, the answer surely lies here. These authors are working in close relation to one another or to common sources, yet they continually recast the material by adding to it, subtracting from it, rear-

1. Theon I, 88-92 (Butts).
2. Theon I, 96-102 (Butts).
ranging it, and rewording it. To posit an ‘oral source’ for these variations is wrong, because it merges the literary-historical approach associated with text and source criticism directly with oral transmission without bringing into view the kind of culture in which oral and written speech interact closely with one another. In other words, those who posit oral sources for the variation are presupposing a ‘copying culture’ linked directly to an ‘oral culture’. The evidence we have in the Progymnasmata and other documents suggests that this approach bypasses a pervasive culture in Mediterranean society in which oral and written speech interacted closely with one another.\footnote{Mack and Robbins, Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels.}

A reader of texts from antiquity can see the kind of variation that results from recitation composition in Plutarch’s three versions of Lysander’s use of his sword in a discussion of territorial boundaries.\footnote{More versions of this story are displayed in V.K. Robbins, Ancient Quotes and Anecdotes: From Crib to Crypt (FFNT; Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1989), pp. 23-24.} The texts are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plutarch, Lysander</th>
<th>Plutarch, Moralia</th>
<th>Plutarch, Moralia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>190E</td>
<td>229C</td>
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\`Aργείους μὲν γὰρ ἀμφιλογομένοις
δικαιότερα τῶν
περὶ γῆς ὡρων καὶ
δικαιότερα τῶν
λακεδαιμονίων
ὁιομένους
λέγειν

Πρὸς δὲ Ἀργείους
δικαιότερα τῶν
λακεδαιμονίων λέγειν
περὶ τῆς
ἀμφισβητουμένης
χάρας
περὶ γῆς ὡρων
ἀμφισβητούντας

πρὸς Λακεδαιμονίους
καὶ δικαιότερα
λέγειν

αὐτῶν φάσκοντας,
σπασάμενος τὴν
μᾶχαιραν, ὁ ταύτης',
ἐφι, 'κρατῶν βέλτιστα
περὶ γῆς ὡρων
διαλέγεται'.

For instance, when the Argives were arguing
when they seemed to state a better case

To the Argives

To the Argives
about boundaries of land, than the Spartans about the disputed territory, who were disputing with the Spartans about boundaries and said they stated a better case than them, and thought they stated a better case than the Spartans, he pointed to his sword, and said, 'He who is master of this discourses best about boundaries of land'. he drew his sword, and said, 'He who is master of this discourses best about boundaries of land'.

The variations among these three accounts look very much like variations among Synoptic Gospel versions. All three versions share verbatim reference to the Spartans’ stating (λέγειν) of a better case (δικαιότερον) concerning (περὶ) the boundaries, reference to the sword (τὴν μάχαιραν), and reference to the saying, 'He who is master of this discourses best about boundaries of land'. In the midst of this verbatim reproduction, however, significant variation exists. The second and third accounts have 'to the Argives' (with variation in the placement of δέ), and agree on 'drawing' rather than 'pointing to' the sword, the first and second have 'a better case than the Spartans' (but in inverted order in the clause), and the first and third have 'about boundaries of land'. Beyond these agreements, each account contains slightly variant wording.

These phenomena display well the results of recitation composition. It is obvious from the verbatim reproduction that one or more of the accounts functioned as a reference text when one of the other accounts was written. Yet the variation among the accounts indicates that there was no concern to copy another text word for word. If the guiding principle had been to copy another text verbatim, the variations among the accounts would have taken the form of different separations of words that create different punctuations of the text, minor variations in spelling and/or wording that correct or improve the text, or absence or presence of clauses through omission, attempts at restoration, and/or conflations of corrected texts.¹ Instead, the three versions of the Lysander account contain multiple variations of wording and rearrangements of phrases prior to the saying. Only the reference to the

1. For an excellent example, see the analysis of Jn 1.1-18 in Finegan, Encountering New Testament Manuscripts, pp. 111-77.
sword and the saying which follows it stand in verbatim agreement in the three accounts, and this is one kind of verbatim overlap that is natural, though not mandatory, in an environment of recitation composition. Here, then, the interpreter sees a good example of the kind of verbatim repetition that may exist in the midst of significant variation in a text produced within the guidelines of recitation composition. There has been no attempt to copy an entire text verbatim, nor has there been complete modification of everything in another text. Rather, the performance of the traditional story combines significant variation with significant verbatim overlap.

There is dispute among interpreters whether the materials in one or both of the accounts in the Moralia were notes Plutarch made and subsequently used when he wrote his Lysander, or the materials were excerpted from the Lysander by himself or some other person for the two accounts in the Moralia.¹ Thus, similar disputes exist in scholarship about the source relationships of the accounts in Plutarch and the Synoptic Gospels. The important thing is for us to see that the same kind of recitation reproduction and variation among multiple accounts exists among documents attributed to Plutarch as among the Gospels. This phenomenon displays, in our opinion, the widespread activity of recitation composition of stories and sayings attributed to specific persons in Mediterranean literature during the early centuries of the common era.

A generally analogous relation of texts exists among the three versions of Jesus’ healing of Peter’s mother-in-law in the Synoptic Gospels. The texts are as follows:

Mt. 8.14-15

Καὶ ἐλθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν Πέτρου εἶδεν τὴν πενθερὰν αὐτοῦ βεβλημένην καὶ

Mk 1.29-31

Καὶ εὐθύς ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς ἐξελθόντες ἤλθον εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν Σίμωνος καὶ Ἀνδρέου μετὰ Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωάννου.

Lk. 4.38-39

'Αναστὰς δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς συναγωγῆς εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν Σίμωνος.

πυρέσσουσαν... πυρέσσουσα, και εὐθὺς λέγουσιν αὐτῷ περὶ αὐτῆς. καὶ προσελθὼν
καὶ ἤγειρεν αὐτὴν
καὶ ἤγατο τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῆς καὶ ἀφῆκεν αὐτῇν ὁ πυρετός: καὶ διηκόνει αὐτῷ.
καὶ ἤγερθη, καὶ διηκόνει αὐτῷ.

And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever; and he touched her hand

And he stood over her and she rose and she served him.

Among these three versions the dynamics of recitation composition are fully evident. All three versions share verbatim reference to going ‘into the house’ of Simon, to the ‘mother-in-law’, to the fever ‘leaving her’, and to her ‘serving’. Some agreements, however, exist only among two versions. The second and third accounts have Jesus come from ‘the synagogue’, use the name ‘Simon’ rather than ‘Peter’, have the disciples tell or ask Jesus ‘about her’, and have the mother-in-law serve ‘them’ rather than ‘him’. The first and second accounts agree in wording as they refer to being ‘sick with a fever’, to touching or
grasping ‘the hand’ of the woman, and to ‘the fever’ leaving her. In the midst of this kind of agreement, each account varies slightly from the other in wording and arrangement of phrases.

Whether Matthew and/or Luke used Mark as a source or Mark used Matthew and/or Luke is less significant than the fact that whoever used whom as a source has exercised freedom in varying the wording. In other words, each writer has proceeded according to the guidelines of recitation composition rather than copying.

Once we become aware of the phenomena common to recitation composition in texts in Hellenistic culture, we may acquire new eyes for understanding Synoptic texts that we usually perceive to stand in a relation of ‘scribal revision’. The Matthean and Markan versions of the calling of two sets of brothers present a good example of the kind of variation that usually would be considered to be the product of scribal revision, because of the nature and extent of the verbatim agreement. The texts look as follows:

**Mt. 4.18-22**

περιπατῶν δὲ παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλλιλαίας εἶδεν δύο ἀδελφοὺς, Σίμωνα τὸν λεγόμενον Πέτρον καὶ Ἀνδρέαν τὸν ἄδελφον αὐτοῦ, βαλλοντας ἀμφίβληστρον εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν· ἦσαν γὰρ ἄλεεις. Καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· δεῦτε ὡπίσω μου, καὶ ποιήσω ὑμᾶς ἁλεείς ἀνθρώπων. οἱ δὲ εὐθέως ἀφέντες τὰ δίκτυα ἥκολοῦθησαν αὐτῶ. Καὶ προβὰς ἐκείθεν εἶδεν ἂλλους δύο ἀδελφοὺς, Ἰάκωβον τὸν τοῦ Ζεβεδαίου καὶ Ιωάννην τὸν ἄδελφον αὐτοῦ, ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ μετὰ Ζεβεδαίου τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῶν καταρτίζοντας τὰ δίκτυα αὐτῶν·

**Mk 1.16-20**

καὶ παράγων παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλλιλαίας εἶδεν Σίμωνα καὶ Ἀνδρέαν τὸν ἄδελφον Σίμωνος ἀμφίβαλλοντας ἐν τῇ θαλάσσῃ· ἦσαν γὰρ ἄλεεις. Καὶ εἰπέκ αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· δεῦτε ὡπίσω μου, καὶ ποιήσω ὑμᾶς γενέσθαι ἁλεείς ἀνθρώπων. Καὶ εὐθὺς ἀφέντες τὰ δίκτυα ἥκολοῦθησαν αὐτῶ. Καὶ προβὰς ὁλίγον εἶδεν Ἰάκωβον τὸν τοῦ Ζεβεδαίου καὶ Ιωάννην τὸν ἄδελφον αὐτοῦ, καὶ αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ καταρτίζοντας τὰ δίκτυα,
καὶ εὐθὺς ἐκάλεσεν αὐτοὺς. καὶ ἀφέντες
tὸ πλοίον καὶ τὸν πατέρα αὐτῶν
ηκολούθησαν αὐτῷ.

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.

And he says to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men’. Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.

Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

καὶ εὐθὺς ἐκάλεσεν αὐτοὺς. καὶ ἀφέντες
tὸν πατέρα αὐτῶν Ζεβεδαίων ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ
μετὰ τῶν μισθωτῶν ἀπῆλθον ὀπίσω αὐτῷ.

And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting in the sea; for they were fishermen.

And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men’. And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away behind him.

The verbatim overlap in these two accounts is extensive, and most of the variations have the nature of addition or omission from the other account. Thus, the phrases ‘two brothers’, ‘who is called Peter’, ‘become’, ‘two other brothers’, ‘with Zebedee their father’, and ‘with the hired servants’ have been added or subtracted by one of the writers. Yet there also is variation in wording, and this rewording combines with rearrangement of the order of phrases near the end of the
account. Thus, Matthew has ‘as he walked’ for Mark’s ‘and passing along’, Matthew has ‘casting a net’ for Mark’s ‘casting’, Matthew has ‘says’ for Mark’s ‘Jesus said’, and Matthew has ‘they followed him’ for Mark’s ‘they went away behind him’. The overall impression is that each composition contains more and more freedom from the wording of the other as the unit progresses, for the end of the accounts have the most variation in wording and arrangement of phrases. When all is said and done in the investigation of these accounts, what we must consider most remarkable in the setting of this much overlap are the variations. There is no embarrassment with extensive verbatim reproduction, yet there is no commitment to verbatim copying. This, I submit, reveals the presence of ‘recitation composition’ as a guiding principle.

Argumentation in Progymnastic Composition

A major reason for insisting that variations among Gospel texts are the result of ‘recitation composition’ is the range of progymnastic composition throughout the Gospels. The nature of the relationship of texts when there is a greater degree of variation than we have analyzed in the preceding section is explained well in the Progymnasmata of Aelius Theon, and initial interpretations have been offered in Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels.¹ In Hellenistic education, after the student became proficient in recitation composition, the teacher continued with exercises in inflexion, positive comment, negative comment, expansion, abbreviation, refutation, and confirmation.² More often than we might suppose, these variations create different kinds of argumentation, something of great importance in a rhetorical culture. In order to see how variations in rhetorical argument accompany small variations in wording, we will examine multiple accounts in Plutarch of Alexander’s refusal to compete in the footrace at Olympia and multiple accounts in the Synoptic Gospels of the woman who touched Jesus’ garment.

In three extant accounts of the young Alexander’s refusal to run in the footrace at Olympia he responds that he would compete if he had kings as competitors. The agreement and variation look as follows:

1. Mack and Robbins, Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels.
'Ελαφρὸς δὲ ἦν καὶ ποδώκης καὶ παρακαλούμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς Ὀλύμπια δραμεῖν στάδιον, οὔτε ἐξείτιστον, ἐξείτιστον ἐπὶ Ὀλύμπια παρομοίωτων, ἤρωτησεν, σιγὰ βασιλεῖς ἀγωνίζονταί· τῶν δ’ οὐ φαμένων, ἄδικον εἶναι τὴν ἁμιλλαν, ἐν τῇ νικήσει μὲν ἰδιώτας, νικηθήσεται δὲ βασιλεῖς.

Being nimble and swiftfooted, when he was appealed to by his father to run at the Olympic footrace, he said: ‘Indeed, if I were to have kings as competitors’. In contrast, when those around him inquired whether he would be willing to compete in the Olympic footrace, for he was swift-footed, he said: ‘Indeed, if I were to have kings as competitors’. Since he was the swiftest of foot of the young men of his age, and his comrades urged him to enter at Olympia, he asked if kings were competing. And when they replied in the negative, he said that the contest was unfair in which a victory would be over commoners, but a defeat would be the defeat of a king.
In the version in the first column, Alexander’s father is the person who raises the issue with Alexander, and Alexander responds with a conditional affirmative, namely, only on the condition that his competitors be kings. This story stands in a collection of apophthegms of kings and commanders, and it is preceded by this story:

While Alexander was still a boy and Philip was winning many successes, he was not glad, but said to his playmates, ‘My father will leave nothing for me to do’. ‘But’, said the boys, ‘he is acquiring all this for you’. ‘But what good is it’, said Alexander, ‘if I possess much and accomplish nothing?’ (Moralia 179D)

In this context it appears to be important that Alexander’s father Philip is the one who appeals to Alexander to compete. The effect of Alexander’s response is to suggest that he will not be distracted by activities that are less prestigious than the exploits of his father. The unstated premises with the conclusion, therefore, appear to be something like this:

| Major premise | Alexander will do nothing less prestigious than his father Philip. |
| Minor premise | Philip wins many successes competing with kings. |
| Conclusion | Alexander will compete at the Olympic footrace only if kings are his competitors. |

The presence of Alexander’s playmates in the preceding story may play a role, since they imply that they would simply enjoy the successes their fathers won. Alexander, in contrast to his playmates, displays the true spirit of the son of Philip by remaining unhappy until he competes with kings themselves—which, of course includes his father. Thus, another implication may be that Alexander would run at Olympia if his own father were willing to run against him.

The version in Alexander 4.10 shares nine Greek words in common with Moralia 179D: ποδόκης (swiftfooted); Ὀλύμπια... στάδιον (Olympic footrace); 'εἰγε', ἔφη, 'βασιλεῖς ἐμελλὼν ἔξειν ἀνταγωνιστάς' (‘Indeed’, he said, ‘if I were to have kings as competitors’). The saying of Alexander contains exactly the same words, but the order of ἐμελλὼν and ἔξειν is reversed in the two versions. Despite the verbatim agreement, those around Alexander, rather than his father, ask if he will compete. The issue in this instance appears to be whether Alexander will seize the opportunity to display his swiftness of foot. In its narrative context, the story is an illustration that
it was neither every kind of fame nor fame from every source that he [Alexander] courted, as Philip did, who plumed himself like a sophist on the power of his oratory, and took care to have the victories of his chariots at Olympia engraved upon his coins (Alexander 4.9).

In this instance, therefore, the story does not concern competition with Philip’s successes but self-restraint and maturity of purpose greater than Philip, who seeks and flaunts his successes. The change of interlocutors from Philip himself to Alexander’s playmates appears to contribute to the broader goal. Instead of responding sharply to his father, Alexander responds to the inquiry of his playmates with restraint and maturity by showing an unwillingness to flaunt his swiftness before his peers. He will use his skills only for his major task at hand—competition with kings. Thus, the premises and conclusion of this version appear to be something like this:

Major premise  Alexander possessed self-restraint and maturity of purpose in contrast to his father who sought and displayed every kind of fame.

Minor premise  If Alexander ran in the Olympic footrace without the most rigorous competition, he simply would be seeking and displaying childhood fame, since he was swiftfooted.

Conclusion  Alexander will compete at the Olympic footrace only if kings are his competitors.

This version of the story evokes a fully epideictic situation as it praises Alexander at Philip’s expense. Through the technique of comparison (σύγκρισις), Alexander emerges as a personage of restraint and maturity of purpose while Philip lives on as a personage who sought prizes and flaunted them when he attained them.

Why would a transmitter of this story feel free to substitute Alexander’s playmates for his father Philip as the one who asks if he will compete in the Olympic footrace? The answer lies in the dynamics of recitation in rhetorical culture. A person feels free to vary the story to bring clarity and persuasiveness to the argument at hand. One may be concerned to establish if the first version of the story is earlier, later, or more authentic than the other, or if it was composed by someone other than Plutarch. But these concerns, which focus on ‘copying’ and ‘sources’, may have no certain answer, while an interpreter may uncover and explore the different strategies of argumentation in the two versions with considerable precision.
A third version in *Moralia* 331B also features Alexander in conversation with his playmates. In this instance, the performance expands the dialogue by having Alexander respond with a question that seeks information before he gives his final response. The result is a dialogue that creates an occasion for Alexander to explain why he would not compete unless kings were his competitors. The reasoning appeals to that which is just and unjust:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major premise</th>
<th>The principle of justice requires that people of equal status compete with one another.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minor premise</td>
<td>If Alexander competes in the Olympic footrace, his defeat would be the defeat of a king but his victory would be over commoners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Alexander will not compete in the footrace at Olympia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are two dynamics within this reasoning that make the account especially interesting. First, Alexander’s statement implies that he himself is a king. Neither of the other versions takes this step: the only assertion was that Alexander would not compete unless kings were his competitors (or at least were among his competitors). Second, while the saying of Alexander articulates a principle of justice as the reason for the refusal to run, the overall saying intermingles a dynamic of honor with a concern about justice. If a king defeats commoners, the primary issue would appear to be justice; but if commoners defeat a king, the primary issue would appear to be the king’s honor. So here the reasoning becomes subtle and witty. Once Alexander calls himself a king, he need not compete with commoners. Since he is a king’s son but not yet actually a king, however, one might think he would display his royal abilities like he does in other boyhood stories.¹ According to the narrator, this should have been no problem for Alexander, since he was the ‘swiftest’ of the young men of his age (an assertion only this version makes). But the issue appears to concern the ambiguous nature of athletic victories. As the narrator says:

Alexander appears to have been averse to the whole race of athletes; at any rate, though he instituted very many contests, not only for tragic poets and players on the flute and players on the lyre, but also for rhapsodists, as well as for hunting of every sort and for fighting with staves, he took no interest in offering prizes either for boxing or for the pancratium (*Alexander* 4.11).

Kings, then, cannot display their true character competing at Olympia; those abilities must emerge in the unexpected situations that confront a person who pursues ‘a king’s business’.

But there appears to be yet one more attribute of character to be valued in a king when this attribute intermingles with a sense of justice, namely cleverness (μητις)—the wit and candor that give a person the ability to handle difficult situations skilfully, quickly, and definitively.\(^1\) To the extent that the story seriously raises the issue of ‘fairness’ among different ranks of people, it contributes well to Plutarch’s presentation of Alexander as ‘a philosopher in his purpose not to win for himself luxury and extravagant living, but to win for all people concord and peace and community of interests’ (Moralia 330E). Alexander’s suggestion that commoners might defeat a king, however, reveals a moment of candor about himself as well as an ability to get out of a potentially embarrassing situation with skill. In each version, then, the act of composition has produced a significantly different rhetorical argument. It is not necessary to posit the existence of an oral source for each new form of the story. Rather, the dynamics of progymnastic composition have created an environment for writing as a rhetorical act.

A similar relation exists among the Synoptic versions of the woman who touched Jesus’ garment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mt. 9.20-22</th>
<th>Mk 5.24b-34</th>
<th>Lk. 8.43-48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνὴ αἰμορροοῦσα δώδεκα ἔτη</td>
<td>Καὶ γυνὴ οὕσα ἐν ρύσει αἴματος δώδεκα ἔτη</td>
<td>Καὶ γυνὴ οὕσα ἐν ρύσει αἴματος ἀπὸ ἐτῶν δώδεκα, ἦτις οὐκ ἵσχυσεν ἀπ' οὐδενὸς θεραπευθῆναι,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δαπανήσασα τὰ παρ' ἔαυτῆς πάντα, καὶ μηδὲν ὀφελήθεισα ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον εἰς τὸ χείρον ἑλθοῦσα, ἀκούσασα τὰ περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, προσελθοῦσα</td>
<td>ύπὸ πολλῶν ἰατρῶν καὶ δαπανήσασα τὰ παρ' ἔαυτῆς πάντα, καὶ μηδὲν ὀφελήθεισα ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον εἰς τὸ χείρον ἑλθοῦσα, ἀκούσασα τὰ περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, προσελθοῦσα</td>
<td>ἐλθοῦσα ἐν τῷ ὄχλῳ προσελθοῦσα</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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ὅπισθεν

ἡγατο τοῦ κρασπέδου
tοῦ ἴματίου αὐτοῦ
ἔλεγεν γὰρ ἐν ἐαυτῇ ἔδω
μόνον ἄγωμαι τοῦ
ἴματίου
αὐτοῦ, σωθήσομαι.

καὶ παραχρῆμα
ἐστὶ ἡ ῥόσις
tοῦ ἴματος αὐτῆς.
καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Ἱησοῦς,
Τὸς ὁ ἀγαμένος μου;
ἀρνομένων δὲ
πάντων
εἶπεν ὁ Πέτρος,
'Επιστάτα, οἱ ὄχλοι
συνεχούσιν σε καὶ
ἀποθλίβουσιν.

ὁ δὲ Ἱησοῦς εἶπεν,
"Ἑγατὸ μοῦ τις, ἐγὼ
γὰρ ἔγνων δόναμιν
ἐξεληλυθὼν ἀπ' ἐμοῦ.

καὶ ἴδων αὐτὴν

τὴν τοῦτο ποίησασαν.
ἡ δὲ γυνὴ φοβηθεῖσα
καὶ τρέμουσα,

εἰδύια ὁ

gέγονεν αὐτῇ, ἤλθεν καὶ
προσεύξεσθαι αὐτῷ καὶ

εἶπεν αὐτῷ πᾶσαν τὴν
ἀλῆθειαν.

εἶπεν· θάρσει,
θύγατερ,
ἡ πιστις σου σέσωκέν
σε.
καὶ ἐσώθη ἡ γυνὴ

ἄπο τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης.
And behold, a woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment; for she said to herself, 'If I only touch his garment, I shall be made well'.

And there was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, 'If I touch even his garments I shall be made well'.

And immediately the hemorrhage ceased; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him, immediately turned about in the crowd, and said, 'Who touched my garments?' And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, "Who touched me?"' And he looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had been done to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him,

And a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years and could not be healed by any one, came up behind him, and touched the fringe of his garment; and immediately her flow of blood ceased. And Jesus said, 'Who was it that touched me?' When all denied it, Peter said, 'Master, the multitudes surround you and press upon you!'

Jesus turned turned about in the crowd, and said, 'Someone touched me; for I perceive that power has gone forth from me'.

And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling and falling down before him,
he said, ‘Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well’.

And he said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease’.

As with the two accounts in Plutarch, there is enough verbatim language to suggest some kind of dependence among the three versions. Yet the final form of each account is the result of a compositional act that produces a significantly different version. This kind of relationship should, in our view, be seen as the result of composition at the level of progymnastic rhetoric.

The Matthean version of the woman who touched Jesus’ garment (9.20-22) contains abbreviated narrative,¹ a saying by the woman, and a saying by Jesus. This story, like the first two versions of the account of Alexander’s refusal to compete in the Olympic footrace, contains only one exchange of conversation among the featured characters. In this instance, however, the display of the logic behind the woman’s act creates a setting in which Jesus’ speech turns the woman’s logic into an actualized syllogism containing a dimension the woman did not articulate and the auditor probably would not supply. In other words, the woman’s statement evokes the following conditional syllogism:

Unstated premise  Touching any part of Jesus can make a person well.
Conditional premise  If I touch only his garment,
Conditional conclusion  I will be made well.

When Jesus says, 'Your faith has made you well', he has introduced a premise that changes the initial premise of the woman's conditional logic, and therefore changes the syllogism. The resultant syllogism is:

Major premise  | An act of faith can make a person well.
Minor premise  | The woman's act of touching was an act of faith.
Conclusion     | Therefore, the woman was made well.¹

The logic has moved the term 'Jesus' out of the unstated premise and introduced a general principle that could be made concrete in various ways. The faith simply could be confidence that healing would occur, or it could be confidence that Jesus or God could make it happen. The logical progression has transformed the initial premise, and therefore the entire logic, into a multi-valent form of reasoning which perpetuates Jewish heritage, attributes distinctive power and understanding to Jesus, and engages cultural beliefs in Asklepios' ability to heal.² The special dynamic of the story, however, is that Jesus' interpretation of the woman's logic enacts the healing. With this version, then, appropriate logic and healing occur simultaneously.

Mk 5.25-34 presents the story in the mode of an expanded chreia.³ The writer presents extended narration, verbal exchange between Jesus and his disciples, and a saying of Jesus that not only announces that the woman's faith has made her well but gives a blessing of peace and health at the end. First, this version narrates the plight, actions, and inner thoughts of the woman, and the inner thoughts present the same logic of the woman that is in the Matthean version (vv. 25-28). Then, inner perception of healing by the woman occurs simultaneously with inner perception by Jesus that power has gone forth from him (v. 30b). Next, Jesus' speech in the form of a question calls forth a response from his disciples. This response repeats Jesus' question in a manner that intensifies emotions between Jesus and his disciples as Jesus looks around to see who touched him (v. 32). This sequence is

based on Jesus’ statement of a conclusion that is based on an unstated major premise and a narrated minor premise:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Major premise</th>
<th>Touching causes healing power to go forth from Jesus.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Minor premise</td>
<td>Jesus felt power go forth from him.</td>
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<td>Conclusion</td>
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While the major premise that touching causes healing power to go forth from Jesus lies implicitly in the Matthean version, that version of the story does not develop either the minor premise or the conclusion that is present in the Markan version. In the next step in the Markan version, Jesus’ search for the person produces emotions in the woman which cause her to come forth and tell him the whole truth (v. 33). At the end of the story, Jesus responds to the woman’s truth-telling with an interpretation of her act as faith and with a double blessing to ‘go in peace’; and ‘be healthy’. Since the healing already occurred earlier in the story, Jesus’ saying does not enact the healing, as it does in Matthew, but registers approval of the woman’s act. Jesus’ saying in the Markan version, therefore, functions as the positive comment (ἐπιφωνείν) that students were taught to add to a brief unit as they were learning the techniques of progymnastic composition.¹

Thus, the Markan version contains interaction between the main character and his associates as well as between the main character and his primary counter character. Also, it presents argumentative logic about healing power flowing from Jesus’ body that the Matthean version does not explore. This way of writing the episode enriches the display of ethos and broadens and intensifies the range of emotions (pathos). The longer version of Jesus’ saying that contains a double blessing of peace and health also is part of this way of writing the episode. The act of writing this story using the technique of amplification, one of the approaches in progymnastic composition, then, changes the function of the saying and introduces a range of rhetorical features not in the Matthean version. Whether Matthew abbreviated Mark's version or Mark expanded Matthew’s version can remain a matter for debate, but the rhetorical differences between the two accounts are amazingly clear and should not be missed in interpretation of either story.

The Lukan version (8.43-48) is different yet from the other two versions, featuring no speech by the woman but attributing speech to

Peter (v. 45) and containing more speech by Jesus than the other two versions (v. 46). The opening part simply presents the woman touching the fringe of Jesus’ garment and being healed (vv. 43-44). Then, in the next two verses (vv. 45-46) Jesus explicitly articulates the syllogism that lies partly in narrative comment and partly in Jesus’ speech in Mark:

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After this, the woman not only reveals to everyone the inner logic present in Matthew and Mark about touching and being healed, but she also tells them how she touched Jesus and immediately was healed. When Jesus responds in the final part of the story, then, he is not responding simply to the woman’s act, but responding to her public announcement of the logic and success of her act. Since the woman’s statement makes Jesus the object of praise in this public setting, Jesus’ final saying now guards against offensive self-praise by calling attention to the woman’s faith rather than the power that went forth from him. Thus it functions like Epameinondas’ saying when he told the men of Thebes:

But it is your doing, men of Thebes; with your help alone I overthrew the Spartan empire in a day (Plutarch, Moralia 542C).¹

In essence, Jesus is telling the woman;

But it is your doing, daughter; with your faith alone the power in me caused your flow of blood to cease.

In this instance, then, the saying of Jesus deflects praise the woman has bestowed dramatically upon him in a public setting where he has just insisted that he felt power go forth from him. If he accepts her praise without demurral, he emerges as a person who loves to flaunt his powers and make women recount them in public. His quick response, giving the woman the credit rather than taking the credit himself, escapes this danger and establishes his status as the gracious patron of a needy client.²

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In all of the instances cited from Plutarch and the Synoptic Gospels, then, different argumentation accompanies internal variations in the stories. The variations are part of writing in a rhetorical culture. While recitation composition begins the process, techniques like abbreviation, expansion, and commentary create different kinds of argumentation using the same story. These kinds of variations, which are typical in the Synoptic Gospels, exhibit composition as influenced by rhetorical culture rather than scribal culture focused on copying previous documents.

**Conclusion**

In previous research, verbal similarities among written versions of stories and sayings regularly have been discussed in terms of 'dependence' on written or oral sources. This terminology emerges from a presupposition that written performance of the material was guided by copying an oral or written antecedent. This language and this perception impose goals and procedures on the writers which are inaccurate, since, even if the writer recently had heard or was looking at a version of the story, the version existed in the eye, ear, and mind of the writer as a 'recitation' that should be performed anew rather than a verbal text that should be copied verbatim. Within a rhetorical culture, then, similarity in wording exhibits 'recitation composition'. A writer in rhetorical culture perceives an antecedent oral or written version of a story or saying as a performance, and a new performance can perpetuate as much or as little verbatim wording as is congenial to the writer. The similarities and variations in wording in both Plutarch and the NT Synoptic writers should make it obvious to us that the guiding principle behind their transmission of stories and sayings is recitation composition.

In this paper we have tried to introduce some markers for identifying progymnastic composition. Also, we have explored some argumentative features that accompany variations among versions of stories produced by progymnastic composition. In addition, we have proposed that recitation composition—writing that presupposes that sources and new compositions are performances in particular contexts—marks the boundary between scribal reproduction and progymnastic composition. We have not explored the boundaries between progymnastic composition and other kinds of writing, because this is a topic too large for this paper. As implied earlier in this paper,
the documents entitled Progymnasmata in antiquity show the outer parameters. The book Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels displays a broader range of progymnastic composition in the Synoptic Gospels than has been displayed here, and it explores more complex rhetorical strategies. A discussion of the ways in which composition in Plutarch's writings goes beyond the progymnastic level of composition in the Synoptic Gospels also must await another context. It has seemed fitting, however, to discuss the place where progymnastic composition begins, since the art of rhetorical interpretation itself is in a new stage of beginnings. With the help of such people as George A. Kennedy, interpreters are challenging the view that writers come into view in biblical texts as copiers of oral and written sources. In fact, most of the writers who produced biblical texts probably were trying to persuade readers to think, feel, and act in particular ways for particular reasons. From our perspective, this means that their placing of writing instrument upon writing material was a rhetorical act.¹

¹ I am grateful to David B. Gower and Mark Ledbetter for their insightful responses to earlier versions of this paper.