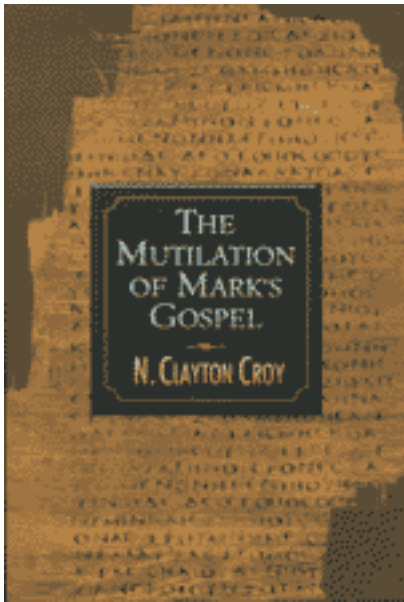


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Croy, N. Clayton

The Mutilation of Mark's Gospel

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N. Clayton Croy has written a book that is sure to attract attention and leave a lasting impact in the field of Markan studies. In *The Mutilation of Mark's Gospel* Croy argues that Mark's Gospel, which ends at 16:8 in the oldest surviving manuscripts with the phrase "for they were afraid" and lacks any postresurrection appearance(s) of Jesus, is not the original way the author (hereafter referred to as Mark) finished his Gospel. Although Croy deliberately avoids the debate of the authenticity of the longer ending preserved in the *Textus Receptus*, comprising Mark 16:9–20, he argues that Mark's Gospel was cut short after 16:8 through some accident to the original text. However, Croy does not stop there but goes on to contend that the beginning of Mark's Gospel is likewise missing and that the opening verse in Mark 1:1, which typically reads "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," was later appended by a scribe to make sense of the gap in the text. Thus Croy is arguing for a double mutilation of Mark's Gospel, at both its beginning and at its end.

The thesis that Mark's Gospel is truncated is by no means a new one, as Croy himself acknowledges. The famous Synoptic scholar Johann Griesbach in the late eighteenth century was among one of the first to suggest that at least the ending of Mark at 16:8 seemed awry and suggested something was missing. However, just because the thesis is old does not mean that Croy's work is stale and is a simple rehashing of previous theses.

Croy integrates past and present scholarship on the Gospel and presents it in such a way that it is not only fresh but also compelling.

In the introduction Croy concisely lays out his thesis of mutilation and then reveals his purpose for writing the book, the primary objective being to reinvigorate the closed debate of the mutilation and truncation of Mark's Gospel. In chapter 2, "A Sea Change in Scholarly Opinion," Croy neatly summarizes scholarship on the ending of Mark's Gospel for about the last two centuries and notes how a radical shift has occurred. During the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century there was an almost universal consensus about Mark that argued that the author of Gospel did not intend for the work to end at 16:8: either Mark did not finish his Gospel, or the last section of the Gospel was somehow damaged or lost after 16:8. Only a small minority of scholars during this period suggested Mark 16:8 was the likely ending of the Gospel. Even as late as the 1920s and 1930s those scholars who believed that 16:8 was the original ending of Mark were still few. However, in the decades following World War II a noticeable shift occurred, as scholars began abandoning the mutilation thesis in favor of one that contended Mark's Gospel was complete. This position subsequently became so entrenched in scholarship that the lost-ending theory was deemed virtually "obsolete" by the 1980s in scholarship.

In chapter 3, "The Reasons for the Shift," Croy contends that the complete turn in scholarship had less to do with the introduction of new evidence that suggested Mark 16:8 was the original ending of the Gospel and more to do with the imposition of new methodologies. Croy believes that, with the advent of "New Criticism" in the 1970s, which placed emphasis on the text to the expense of its social, historical, and literary context, the shift in scholarly consensus was readily facilitated. New Criticism sought to discover the meaning of the text as it stood, cared primarily about the final form of the text, and left little room for mutilated texts. As a result, all kinds of creative theses emerged that sought to understand Mark's ending at 16:8: from Mark's secret about the resurrection to his desire to spur the followers of Jesus on to write the ending of the Gospel through the actions of their own lives.

In chapter 4, "The Gaping Wound," Croy attempts to prove through a series of eight arguments that Mark 16:8 is not the original ending of the Gospel. His arguments, which range from lack of closure in the Gospel to grammatical and stylistic problems with Mark 16:8, are both interesting and compelling. The most substantive argument Croy appeals to that favors a lost ending is under the rubric, "We Would See Jesus: The Argument from Narrative Expectations." In this section Croy argues that Mark had a habit of demonstrating Jesus' words by narrating their accomplishment. He points out that in Mark 14:28 Jesus promises his disciples that when he is resurrected he will go before them into Galilee. This promise is reiterated to the women at the tomb at Mark 16:7. Croy

believes that since Mark mentioned this he would have followed up and narrated the reunion in Galilee. Croy then cites two examples from the Gospel where Jesus makes promises and Mark deliberately goes on to relate how they are fulfilled. In Mark 7:29–30 a Syrophenician woman comes to Jesus and asks him to free her absent daughter from a demon. Jesus consents, and Mark relates how the women went home and found that the demon had left her daughter. Later, in Mark 10:46–52, Jesus tells blind Bartimaeus that he is healed, but Mark again goes on to relate that immediately afterward he regained his sight. In Mark's Gospel Jesus' words were not enough: Mark always narrated how they were fulfilled. For Croy this strongly implies that Mark 14:28 and 16:7 were fulfilled and narrated in the original ending of Mark.

In chapter 5, "An Assortment of Literary Bandages," Croy surveys the various hypotheses scholars have put forward to make sense of the abrupt ending to Mark's Gospel at 16:8. Although at times he may be a bit abrupt and dismissive, Croy is respectful and usually quite careful when criticizing theories that try to bring rationale to Mark's ending. Even if he is not completely persuasive and successful in dismantling all his opponents' theories, he is quite apt at pointing out their weaknesses.

Croy puts forward his argument that Mark's beginning, like the ending, is also missing from the text in chapter 6, "Frontal Damage." Croy correctly remarks that this hypothesis is usually overshadowed by the debate about the ending of the Gospel, but he fails to acknowledge that the frontal mutilation theory of the Gospel is also overshadowed by the debate concerning its ending because it rests on much slimmer evidence. While most scholars have conceded that Mark 1:1 is somewhat awkward, the evidence for mutilation is paltry. Nevertheless, Croy marshals what evidence he can for frontal mutilation, namely, stylistic and grammatical problems with Mark 1:1, and goes on to assert that this verse was later added by a scribe sometime in the second century to account for a missing portion at the beginning of the Gospel.

In the seventh chapter, "Was the Codex the Cause?" Croy ties together his double mutilation theory for Mark by suggesting that a codex form of the Gospel was responsible for the loss of both the beginning and the ending. According to this theory, Mark's Gospel was likely a single-quire codex, one where the beginning and ending of the Gospel were on the same sheet and made up the outside of the Gospel; thus they were most susceptible to damage. Croy points to the early Christian penchant for codices instead of scrolls and argues that it is possible that the autograph copy of Mark was written in codex form. As for the provenance of Mark, Croy sees no reason to object to the long-standing tradition that it was written in Rome and demonstrates from the Roman poet Martial that codices were being used as early as the mid-first century C.E. in Rome.

Although this chapter is built upon a number of speculations and hypotheses, Croy's argument is certainly plausible.

The Mutilation of Mark's Gospel is a stimulating read worthwhile for anyone interested in the Gospel of Mark and early Christian studies in general. It is written with clarity and offers an alternative approach to interpreting both Mark 1:1 and 16:8. Although the book is at times rather technical, such as when Croy marshals arguments from the Greek to support his contentions, the book is also very readable and so serves the needs of scholar and layperson alike. While Croy's argument for mutilation at Mark 16:8 is compelling, his arguments for Mark's mutilation at 1:1 are not as convincing. However, even if his argument for frontal mutilation is weak and is proven to be incorrect, it does not affect either his codex hypothesis or his case for a missing ending. In the final analysis, Croy's work should make an impression on the current state of the question, and his clarion call for further reconsideration of the Gospel is certainly welcome.