REVISITING THE EMPTY TOMB: THE POST-MORTEM VINDICATION OF JESUS IN MARK AND Q

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Abstract

Q 13:34-35 connects Jesus’ disappearance with his future eschatological role as the “Coming One” in a manner suggestive of other Jewish materials that understand the assumption of a prophet or sage as the basis of a special eschatological function. If Q also betrays a knowledge of Jesus’ death, the assumption of Jesus becomes, for Q, the mode of his post-mortem vindication. Mark’s “Empty Tomb” story (Mark 16:1-8) may be seen as a post-mortem disappearance narrative; this raises the possibility that Q and Mark (or a pre-Markan source) may have expressed a belief in Jesus’ vindication by God in quite similar terms.

1. Introduction

The Sayings Gospel Q contains neither a passion narrative nor an explicit reference to the death of Jesus, and it appears not to presume resurrection theology as the logic of his vindication. Q is interested in corporate persecution and vindication, as texts such as Q 6:22-23 and 12:8-9, 11-12 show. Yet this does not mean that the individual vindication of Jesus is not also a pressing issue for Q, which shows evidence of a belief in an exalted post-mortem Jesus.

1 This paper was presented, in a slightly different form, at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies, Université Laval, Québec, Canada, May 25, 2001.
4 See Kloppenborg, “Easter Faith,” 76-82.
An "exalted" Jesus seems to be presumed in sayings, for instance, about the heavenly or suddenly appearing Son of man, such as Q 12:8-9 and Q 17:23-37. Whatever the original referent of the term "Son of man" in sayings such as these, the fact that "Son of man" is applied to Jesus elsewhere in Q invites the conclusion that, for the final redaction at least, the coming Son of man is the non-earthly Jesus as a figure of the eschatological future. There are also indications in Q that this "non-earthly" Jesus is Jesus who has died. Q associates discipleship or allegiance to Jesus with the persecution and murder of prophets (Q 6:22-23; 11:49-51; 13:34-35), and certain Q sayings—for example, the Cross Saying (Q 14:27) or the Jerusalem Lament (Q 13:34-35)—must have been heard (or even composed) with the death of Jesus in mind. So then, given (1) that Q apparently knows about Jesus' death by crucifixion, and (2) that a resurrection theology cannot be presumed for the Sayings Gospel, the question is this: does Q have another way of expressing Jesus' post-mortem vindication?

From its roots in Mesopotamian mythology, the idea of assumption—the final bodily removal of a human person from earth to heaven—was uniformly associated with heavenly exaltation or deification. In the Jewish tradition in particular, the assumed person was almost always thought of as reserved in heaven pending a special eschatological role. Though normally assumption was considered an escape from death, sometimes assumption language and motifs were applied to persons who had died. In this paper it will be argued that Q shows evidence of the belief that God vindicated Jesus after his death by means of assumption. A related issue is whether Mark's "Empty Tomb" story may have originally been a post-mortem disappearance narrative, rather than a resurrection story. The possibility that Q and Mark (or a pre-Markan source) may have imagined the post-mortem vindication?

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ocation of Jesus in similar ways, without reference to resurrection, is certainly enticing.9

2. Assumption Theology in the Sayings Gospel Q

To be sure, there is in Q no full-blown assumption narrative such as those found concerning Elijah or Enoch or Romulus or other figures. However, the Jerusalem Lament (Q 13:34-35) displays some language and motifs that are consistent with assumption theology. Jesus says, “I tell you, you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is the Coming One in the name of the Lord’” (13:35b). In a 1985 essay, Dieter Zeller noted that the expression “You will not see me” (οὐ μὴ ἴδητε με) is similar to the language typically used for an assumption-related disappearance.10 In fact, a negated form of ὁράω occurs quite commonly in assumption narratives, including 2 Kgs. 2:12 LXX. Such a locution can function as a synonym for disappearance.11 “Not seeing” also suggests an unsuccessful search for the body, another standard motif in assumption narratives.12 Zeller also noted that the reference to the Coming One in Q 13:35b is typical of the connection between assumption and special eschatological function.13 One detail overlooked by Zeller, however, is the fact that Q 13:35b is an assumption prediction. This is significant because foreknowledge of assumption is another typical feature in assumption narratives (see, for instance, 2 Kgs. 2:3, 5, 10; 1 En. 81:6; 4 Ezra 14; 2 Bar. 76:1-5).

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9 This has already been suggested by R. Uro, “Jeesus-liike ja ylōsnousemus,” in idem, Jeesus-liikkeestä kristinsukkoista (Helsinki: Yliopistopaino, 1995) 93-111, esp. 110-1. An English translation of this essay (“The Jesus Movement and the Resurrection”) was prepared for me by Hannu Aalto, with corrections by Risto Uro.


11 A negated form of ὁράω appears in assumption narratives about Elijah (2 Kgs. 2:12 LXX: καὶ οὐκ ἴδεν αὐτόν ἔτι; see also 2 Kgs. 2:10); Xisouthros (Berossos, Babyl. frag. 4a: οὐκ ἔτι ὀφθήκεν), Romulus (Plutarch, Rom. 27.5: οὗτε μέρος ὄφθη σῶματος), and Proteus (Lucian, Perigr. 39: οὐ μὴν ἑορτάζω γε). Similar language (οὐκέτι οὐδένα ἔδον) also appears in Mark 9:8, when Elijah and Moses are removed from the scene of the Transfiguration. Such language functions synonymously with the more typical ἀφαν- disappearance language; see G. Lohfink, Die Himmelfahrt Jesu: Untersuchungen zu den Himmelfahrts- und Erhöhungstexten bei Lukas (SANT 26; München: Kosel, 1971) 58.

12 Bickermann, “Das leere Grab” [original publication], 290; Lohfink, Himmelfahrt Jesu, 45. See Gen. 5:24 LXX; 2 Kgs. 2:16-18; see also Berossos, Babyl. frag. 4a; Plutarch, Rom. 27.7; Chariton, Chaer. 3.3; T. Job 39:8-12; Prot. Jas. 24:9.

There is also other evidence in Q for a belief in Jesus’ assumption. The Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants (Q 12:42-46) describes the absence of a householder and his sudden return to render judgment on his servants. Absence and return in and of itself is suggestive of the typical connection between assumption/disappearance and eschatological function, but the final shape of this section of Q supplies some additional evidence. The preceding pericope, Q 12:39-40, likens the coming of the Son of man to the arrival of a thief to break into a house. As Heinz Schürmann noted, “the discrepancy between the metaphor, which portrays a calamitous event, and its application to the coming Son of Man probably points to a secondary expansion.” It is also likely, as Schürmann went on to suggest, that “the composition . . . continued to grow secondarily” through the addition of 12:42-46. Assuming such a redactional scenario, an initial parable about the coming of a thief was first expanded with a coming Son of man interpretation, and then was secondarily joined to a parable about an absent and returning master. On Kloppenborg’s model of the composition of Q, the parable about the delayed master belongs to the same redactional stratum as Q 13:35b, which, as has been argued, predicts the assumption and absence of Jesus before his return as the Coming One. Finally, it may also be noted that a similar convergence of absent master and coming Son of man material appears later in Q (Q 17:23-37 + Q 19).

There are several implications of Q’s use of assumption as an expression of Jesus’ post-mortem vindication. First, assumption was uniformly understood in the ancient world as an expression of divine favour. Only persons of extraordinary merit, or indeed of divine origin, were taken up in this way. In Greco-Roman funerary inscriptions, assumption language is frequently applied to those who have died young and the gods are blamed for the untimely death. Even in such cases the suggestion is unavoidable that “Those whom the gods love die young,” in the words of Menander. This effectively reverses the stigma of early death. In Classical Greek antiquity, youth and death were correlated as part of a cycle of renewal, but in funerary cultures the lament for the sudden death of a young and promising life was commoner than the lament for an old and experienced one. In the Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants, Q 12:42-46, the sudden absence of the master is a feature that the interpretation of the Son of man amplifies. The master represented in the redactional scenario was originally a contemporaneous figure. The Son of man was a later figure who emerged in the Q horizons. The sudden and unexpected absence of the first and the appearance of a second coincide, according to Schürmann, with our understanding of assumption in Greco-Roman culture.

15 Schürmann, “Son of Man Title,” 88.
17 See Gen. 5:22, 24 LXX; Wisd. 4:10; Jos., Ant. 4.326.
18 See the discussion in A.-M. Vézilhac, ΠΑΙΔΕΣ ΑΘΡΩΤ: Poésie funéraire (2 vols.; ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑΙ ΤΗΣ ΚΑΚΔΗΜΙΑΣ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ 41; ΑΘΗΝΑΙ: ΓΡΑΦΕΙΟΝ ΔΗΜΟΣΙΕΥΜΑΤΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑΣ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ, 1978) 2.173-203.
death. In his remarks on Q 13:34-35, Zeller suggested that Jesus is not specifically mentioned among the murdered prophets in Q 13:34 for two reasons. First, assumption is typically an escape from death, so the death of Jesus must be passed over.19 There is, however, strong evidence for the application of assumption language to persons who had died.20 Second, Zeller also argued that the death of Jesus is not mentioned in Q because resurrection, and not assumption, is the proper vindication for a wrongful death.21 This too may be questioned, particularly since the divine favour associated with assumption would have provided a significant reversal of the rejection of Jesus (suggested in Q 13:34) and of the shame of public execution (hinted at in Q 14:27).

Second, as already noted, a typical correlate of assumption was special eschatological function. Because the assumed person was thought of as being reserved in heaven until the proper time, heavenly exaltation was also a correlate of assumption. Thus assumption theology in Q has the benefit of explaining how Jesus could be thought of as the heavenly Son of man whose return was expected. In fact, assumption theology is a somewhat more economical explanation for the origin of these beliefs than resurrection theology, especially because the latter requires an intermediate step, such as enthronement or ascension.22 For Luke, the resurrection reverses Jesus’ wrongful death (Acts 2:23-24; 4:10, and his ascension explains his exaltation (Acts 2:31-35) and eschatological significance (Acts 1:11).23 Apparently assumption theology could serve to express the same convictions.

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20 See, for instance, Wisd. 4:10-11, 14; T. Job 39-40; Prot. Jas. 23; Chariton, Chaer. 3:3; Plutarch, Rom. 28; Callimachus, frag. 228 (see below, n. 26); Antoninus Liberalis, Metam. 1, 8, 13, 25, 33, 37.
22 For instance, Norman Perrin argued that “the expectation of the coming of Jesus as apocalyptic Son of man is a product of [that] exegetical process” which first interpreted the resurrection of Jesus in light of Psalm 110, and then interpreted the resulting “mar-Christology” in light of Zech. 12:10 and Dan. 7:13 (“The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition,” BR 13 [1968] 3-25, esp. 3-4). The problem with supposing this kind of exegetical rationale for the belief in Q is the fact that it has left no trace whatsoever.

Some caution is required here, however. There are a few instances in ancient literature where assumption appears to have been credited to individuals who were already expected to have a special eschatological role. In the cases of Ezra and Baruch in the first-century apocalypses attributed to them, and in the case of Tabitha in the Coptic Apocalypse of Elias, assumption appears as a secondary rationalization of the eschatological significance of these characters. Thus the question should probably remain open whether a belief in Jesus’ assumption was, for the Q community, the origin of their expectation of his return as the Son of man. On the other hand, it has sometimes been taken for granted that resurrection faith was the origin of this expectation in Q. If there is no hint whatsoever of resurrection theology in Q, and if there is at least a hint of assumption theology, perhaps the latter should not be ruled out as being of fundamental christological significance for Q.

3. Mark’s “Empty Tomb” Story as a Post-Mortem Disappearance Narrative

Some early Christian writings avoided explicit mention of resurrection while affirming Jesus’ post-mortem exaltation. The pre-Pauline hymn in Philippians 2 is probably the earliest example of this. The

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24 4 Ezra 14:8-9, 13, and the conclusion to 4 Ezra 14 in the non-Latin versions; 2 Bar. 76:1-5.
3 Assumption sometimes was used to explain the veneration as gods of certain figures in Greco-Roman religion. Archaeological evidence of the veneration of Herakles as a god predates any evidence, literary or otherwise, of a belief in his funeral pyre assumption. The myth of Herakles’ apotheosis on Mount Oeta probably served to explain the origin of cult practices, underway by the sixth century BCE at the same location and elsewhere, which honoured Herakles not as a hero but as a god (H.A. Shapiro, “Hērōs Theos: The Death and Apotheosis of Herakles,” CW 77 [1983] 7-18, esp. 15-17). Ptolemy II, upon his marriage to his sister, Arsinoë II Philadelphos, commissioned coinage bearing their images and the inscription ΘΕΩΝ ΑΔΕΑΦΙΩΝ, and established a cult in their own honour (R.A. Hazzard, Imagination of a Monarchy: Studies in Ptolemaic Propaganda [Phoenix Supplementary Volume 37; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000] 89-93). After Arsinoë’s death in 268 BCE, Callimachus wrote of her post-mortem assumption by the Dioscuri in his elegy Ἐκθέοτοι τ’ Ἀρισινόεις (Callimachus, frag. 228; Dieg. 10.10). For materials concerning the posthumous veneration of Arsinoë II, see J. Quaegebeur, “Documents Concerning a Cult of Arsinoë Philadelphos at Memphis,” JNES 30 (1971) 239-70. I wish to thank John Kloppenborg for pointing out the materials about Arsinoë.
27 See, for instance, Tödt, Son of Man, 268; Hoffmann, Studien, 142.
author of Hebrews does not use resurrection language at all, sometimes passing directly from Jesus’ death to his exaltation (Heb. 1:3; 2:9). The sole reference to the resurrection uses language reminiscent of ascent rather than traditional resurrection language (Heb. 13:20). Without clear evidence, however, it would not be justified to supply, as some have done, either assumption theology or resurrection theology as the implied means of vindication in these instances.  

There are, however, more promising possibilities in early Christian literature than these. The Gospel of Peter uses assumption language at the point of Jesus’ death on the cross (ἀνελήφθη, Gos. Pet. 5.19), and an addition after Mark 16:3 in the Old Latin Codex Bobbiensis might have originally described an ascent of Jesus from the cross. In both these cases, however, the context points not to bodily assumption, but to the ascent of Jesus’ soul. The best evidence for the use of assumption theology as an expression of Jesus’ post-mortem vindication comes from the end of the Gospel of Mark.

Several features of Mark’s Empty Tomb narrative (Mark 16:1-8) suggest the possibility that it could have been understood as an assumption story, particularly in view of the fact that Mark describes no appearance of the risen Jesus. First and most significant is the absence of the body; the connection between disappearance and assumption was so strong in antiquity that it often took no more than a missing body for the conclusion to be reached that an assumption had taken place. This is what Chaereas concludes when Callirhoe’s body goes missing from her tomb (Chariton, Chaer. 3.3): he wonders if Callirhoe has been taken away by some divine agent, or whether unbenownst to him she was in fact a goddess and now has returned to the divine realm. Sjef van Tilborg and Patrick Chatelion Counet have recently observed that the remarks of Chaereas at the empty tomb are, in fact, incidental, because they do not serve to advance the plot. Thus, this

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“is a text which prototypically determines how ... the disappearance of a body from a grave was interpreted religiously.”

The absence of Jesus’ body is emphasized in Mark 16, secondly, by the reference to the women’s search for Jesus.

And when they entered the tomb, they saw a young man seated on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed: you seek Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place where they laid him.” (Mark 16:5-6)

As already noted, a fruitless search for a body often served to confirm that an assumption had occurred; here, the young man observes the women’s search and gives the reason for its failure: “he is not here.”

A third assumption motif is the testimony of the witness confirming the disappearance. Whether the νεανίσκος here is a young man (see Mark 14:51-52) or an angel does not matter, because both heavenly and earthly figures may authenticate assumptions. A final element consistent with assumption stories in antiquity is the reference to the appearance in Galilee (16:7), since epiphanies, sometimes occurring at quite a distance from the place of the assumption, also could confirm an assumption had taken place. On the other hand, the most important element of Mark’s Empty Tomb story that is not consistent with assumption narratives is the word ἡγερθη, “he has been raised.”

Scholars who have noticed the similarities between Mark 16:1-8 and assumption stories have attempted, in various ways, to account for the inconsistency which ἡγερθη represents. Elias Bickermann, the first to suggest that Mark’s Empty Tomb story is an assumption narrative (1924), made the observation that a resurrection may only be proved by narrating either an encounter with the risen person or the event itself. Mark 16:1-8 does neither. The empty tomb would have been understood as a proof of Jesus’ assumption, not resurrection. Bickermann

30 van Tilborg and Counet, Appearances and Disappearances, 194.
32 Lohfink, Himmelfahrt Jesu, 45-46.
33 Ibid., 45-46; Bickermann, “Das leere Grab,” 290-1. Pesch calls the appearance referred to in 16:7 a “Bestätigungs-vision” (Markusevangelium, 2.525-7, 534-5).
34 Bickermann, “Das leere Grab,” 281-2. In fact, later adjustments to the end of Mark attempted to furnish one proof or the other: the longer ending (vv. 9-20) narrates several appearances of Jesus, and, as seen above, the interpolation in Codex Bobbiensis appears to describe a visible resurrection (ibid., 282).
therefore argued that Mark had altered an “Urbericht” about the assumption of Jesus from the tomb to fit his needs. This accounts for the intrusive nature of ἡγεῖσθαι; it was added by Mark, for whom resurrection theology was “selbstverständlich.”36 Bickermann suggested that the assumption story used by Mark originated in a circle—actually, the “Urgemeinde”—that believed that Jesus was exalted immediately after his death.37 This understanding of Jesus’ fate was quickly overshadowed by resurrection theology, which was more at home in the Hellenistic groups which knew of the dying and rising figures of the mystery religions. Thus, according to Bickermann, “eroberte die neue Auffassung nicht nur die neue Welt, sondern auch die alte der Urgemeinde.”38

Bickermann’s view was taken up by Neill Hamilton (1965),39 who likewise found the Empty Tomb story as being at odds with resurrection theology. Hamilton argued that the Empty Tomb narrative

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36 Ibid., 290. In Bickermann’s view this is consistent with Mark’s method of violently (“gewaltsam”) inserting “Palestinian” tradition into the framework of his own Hellenistic theology (ibid.). As evidence of Mark’s adaptation of the “Urbericht,” Bickermann noted: (1) the promise of an appearance in Galilee, since in Bickermann’s view assumption and epiphany do not go together (ibid., 289; cf. Lohfink, Himmelfahrt Jesu, 43-46); and (2) the command to the women, only a “connecting link” between the assumption account and the appearance traditions (Bickermann, “Das leere Grab,” 289).

37 Bickermann, “Das leere Grab,” 290.


was created by Mark primarily in reaction to traditions of the appearances of the risen Jesus; he called the Empty Tomb story "an anti-resurrection story," because "it avoids displaying the resurrected Jesus." But Hamilton did not attempt to explain the presence of ἀνέστη in Mark 16:5. Mark's purpose in composing the Empty Tomb narrative was to draw attention away from the resurrection appearances to the absence of Jesus, in order to highlight the Parousia. According to Hamilton, "Mark's special contribution to the eschatological crisis after 70 is his conviction that the resurrected Lord should be replaced by a translated and returning Son of man."42

A similar view has been propounded more recently by Adela Yarbro Collins (1992), who argues that Mark 16:1-8 is Mark's own composition. Collins deals with the problem of ἀνέστη by suggesting that, in Mark's understanding, Jesus was resurrected; Mark makes use of the narrative pattern of assumption because it was "a culturally defined way for an author living in the first century to narrate the resurrection of Jesus." For Mark, Jesus' resurrection is physical, so the body is not in the tomb; but because Jesus does not make an appearance in Mark, Collins suggests that "the alternative is that he ascended to heaven immediately." The affirmation that an individual, Jesus, had been raised from the dead "seemed quite similar to the claim . . . that Enoch had been taken up into heaven and to the claims made . . . regarding the translation or apotheosis of heroes, rulers, and emperors."46

40 Hamilton, "Resurrection Tradition," 417. Hamilton suggested that the fact that "the women did not tell anyone shows that Mark is apologizing for a story which no one knew until he created and published it to the church. The reference to Peter in 16:7 shows that he is aware of the tradition of 1 Cor 15:3-5 and that feels he ought to make Peter the first witness of Jesus' resurrection" (ibid.).
42 Ibid, 420. For a similar view, see B. Mack, A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 308: "Were a cosmic presence to be inferred [from the resurrection appearances], the apocalyptic concerns for vindications, judgments, and the eventual manifestation of the kingdom of God in human social history would be threatened."
44 Collins, "Empty Tomb," 147.
45 Ibid., 146.
46 Ibid., 146-7.
Bickermann, Hamilton, and Collins all correctly distinguished between resurrection and assumption, for although both types of language apparently were used to account for the vindication of Jesus, they clearly describe different phenomena.\(^{47}\) Assumption and resurrection differ first of all with respect to the fate of the body. Assumption involves the disappearance of the body, although it seems that in some instances assumption language and theology is used almost euphemistically (as opposed to realistically) for someone who had died.\(^{48}\) Resurrection as an individual mode of post-mortem vindication, whether or not the body itself is thought of as being revived, involves an appearance of the resurrected person, rather than the disappearance of the body.\(^{49}\) Assumption and resurrection also differ in their associated theological ideas. Assumption is typically connected with divine favour and status elevation, and consistently connected, in Jewish thought at least, with special eschatological function. With resurrection, such ideas—particularly exaltation—are sometimes present, but often only with special exegetical rationale. Luke distinguished between resurrection and assumption, and this is good grounds for our distinction between these two categories.\(^{50}\)

If resurrection and assumption are different, the question arises as to their combination in Mark 16:1-8. Bickermann, of course, was correct to say that resurrection theology was “selbstverständlich” to Mark\(^{51}\) (see Mark 8:31; 9:9-10; 9:31; 10:34; 14:28). It may be that Mark used a pre-existing story about the disappearance of Jesus’ body from the tomb, and adapted it by adding his characteristic resurrection theology.

\(^{47}\) Compare Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 2.522-7. Pesch describes at great length the sources which describe the disappearance and the not-finding (“Nichttauffindbarkeit”) of bodies, yet consistently equates assumption and resurrection (“Enträückung bzw. Auferweckung”) as the beliefs substantiated by such phenomena. For Pesch the most important text proving the connection between assumption and resurrection is *Testament of Job* 39–40 (ibid., 2.525-6), apparently because the bodies of Job’s children disappear and they experience heavenly glorification. But Pesch presumes, rather than explains or proves, the connection between resurrection and assumption.

\(^{48}\) See Smith, “Assumption,” 290-3 on the *dikaios* in Wisdom 2-5 and the parallels in Hellenistic consolation literature. In such uses disappearance language does not occur (since the body does not disappear), though other assumption terminology—particularly rapture (ἀρπαξόμεθα and cognates) or taking up (ἀναλαμβάνω) language—does occur.

\(^{49}\) See 1 Cor. 15:5-8, the appearance narratives in Matthew, Luke, and John, and *Gos. Pet.* 10.

\(^{50}\) Compare Acts 2:23-24; 4:10 (resurrection as post-mortem vindication) with Acts 2:31-35 (assumption as exaltation) and Acts 1:11 (assumption as expressive of eschatological significance).

\(^{51}\) Bickermann, “Das leere Grab,” 290.
Probably the strongest indication that Mark was working with source material is verse 7, which has the appearance of an insertion that interrupts its context. Jesus gives precisely the same message about a Galilean appearance to the Twelve at the Last Supper (Mark 14:28; compare καθὼς εἶπεν ὑμῖν, 16:7). Mark 14:28 also interrupts its context, for Peter’s remark in verse 29 seems more apt as a reaction to what Jesus says in verse 27. Mark 16:7 can similarly be removed: without verse 7, the νεανίσκος shows the women the place where Jesus’ body had been, and they flee, telling no one. There would have originally been no inconsistency between the explicit command “Tell” (ἔησεν τοῖς μαθηταῖς, 1 Cor. 15:5-7), which is not in Mark 14:28. The fact that the command names “the disciples and Peter” (ἔησεν τοῖς μαθηταῖς καὶ τῷ Πέτρῳ) suggests that it is a rapprochement to appearance traditions such as the one preserved in 1 Cor. 15:3-8, especially because Mark 16:7 includes the verb ὁφθηκεν (compare ὁφθηκεν, 1 Cor. 15:5-7), which is not in Mark 14:28. Furthermore, ἐγέρθη in 16:6 and μετὰ τὸ ἐγέρθηκαί με in 14:28 are closely similar, and are suggestive of the pre-pauline tradition in 1 Cor. 15:4 (ἤγησεν). If Mark composed the Empty Tomb story in order to subvert the appearance tradition, as Hamilton and Crossan have argued, why has he included this reference to the appearances to Peter and the other disciples? It seems more likely that Mark is adapting a pre-Markan story with the purpose of conforming it to the kerygmatic appearance tradition. If Mark did not narrate any appearances because his source did not contain any, the Empty Tomb story was from the beginning a disappearance story.

This is all somewhat conjectural, however, and a detailed tradition-historical analysis of Mark 16:1-8 is impossible here. But if it can be


53 See Bultmann, History, 285; Collins, “Empty Tomb,” 133.

54 Lüdemann, Resurrection, 118: “Note that v. 7 has been inserted by Mark into the tradition, but earlier knowledge seems to have been preserved in the redaction.” So also Uro, “Jesus-liike ja ylösnoosemus,” 104-5.


57 For bibliography, see Merklein, “Epilog,” 233-8. Some argue for a pre-Markan
argued that Mark adapts a tradition about Jesus’ assumption from the grave, then it would appear that the Q community was not alone in imagining Jesus’ post-mortem vindication and exaltation along such lines. Such a similarity may even be the result of shared ideas or traditions. This would mean that the claims of some scholars about the origin of a pre-Markan Empty Tomb story would have to be re-evaluated. For instance, Gerd Lüdemann thinks that “those who handed down these traditions ‘concluded’ from the message [of the kerygma] that the crucified one had risen that the tomb of Jesus was empty. The present story is as it were the product of a conclusion or a postulate.” But an empty tomb story does not necessarily presuppose resurrection. Obviously, for Mark and the other evangelists the empty tomb signifies the resurrection of Jesus, but given the contemporary view that the disappearance of a body signifies assumption, it is certainly possible that an earlier group or groups could have understood a story about Jesus’ empty tomb differently—particularly if we are correct about the presence of assumption theology in Q.

4. The Function of Mark 16:1–8 as the Conclusion of the Gospel

It remains only to ask how Mark 16:1–8, understood as an assumption story, functions as the conclusion of the Gospel. Three observations may be made. First, as both Hamilton and Collins suggested, an assumption-related absence of the post-mortem Jesus is oriented in Mark to the Parousia. The result of an assumption-related absence at the end of Mark is an emphasis on the future presence of the assumed Jesus in the coming of the Son of man. As argued above, this connection between removal and return applies to Q as well, and may be seen not only in Q 13:34–35, but also in Q 12:39–46 and Q 17 and 19.

Another issue has to do with the socio-religious function of Mark’s Empty Tomb story when compared with the appearance traditions such as the one preserved in 1 Cor. 15:5–8. This tradition, and Paul’s addendum to it, apparently serves to legitimate authority, as Ulrich Wilckens argued. This obviously is not Mark’s concern: the reference

58 Lüdemann, Resurrection, 121.
59 U. Wilckens, “Der Ursprung der Überlieferung der Erscheinungen des Auferstanden:
(probably redactional) to the appearance to Peter is probably a concession to such legitimating traditions, but it remains that the only witnesses of the empty tomb are the terrified women, and that what they witness is in fact Jesus’ absence. A disappearance story would have evoked ideas about Jesus’ exaltation and coming role in the eschatological drama, and the emphasis on the failure of the disciples to apprehend the mystery of Jesus’ post-mortem vindication would have pressed Mark’s readers to examine the authenticity of their own discipleship, rather than focus on the privileged experiences of the early Christian leaders.  

A third observation has to do with the connection between assumption and apotheosis or “heroification” in Greco-Roman thought. Recently Peter Bolt expressed reservations about comparisons of Mark’s Empty Tomb story with Greco-Roman assumption narratives, particularly because of the association with apotheosis or hero-veneration. Bolt’s objections in some cases are well-founded, at least where evidential issues are concerned. Yet he also argues that Mark would have found an assumption story ill-suited to his Gospel presentation. For in the first place, assumption is an escape from death, and Jesus has clearly died in Mark; and in the second place, assumption is the Greek view results in apotheosis, and “according to Mark’s presentation, Jesus has already refused the opportunity of an apotheosis (along the more normal lines), when he came down from the mountain of transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13).”

To suggest that a Greek audience reading Mark’s Empty Tomb story would have concluded that Jesus’ disappearance signifies his apotheosis is to overlook the fact that assumption could also, in Greco-Roman literature, signify the return to the divine realm of a person


60 See Grossan, “Empty Tomb,” 152.


63 In particular, Bolt shows Hamilton’s confusion of assumption with hero-veneration, which is always associated with the grave-site of the hero, or at least a surrogate grave-site, the cenotaph (ibid., 30-33).

64 Ibid., 37.
of divine origin or status.\textsuperscript{65} As already suggested, this double significance of assumption is brought to expression in the novel \textit{Chaereas and Callirhoe}, when Chaereas is confronted with another empty tomb: “Which of the gods has become my rival and carried off Callirhoe and now keeps her with him, against her will but compelled by a mightier fate? … Or can it be that I had a goddess as my wife and did not know it, and she was above our human lot?” (Chariton, \textit{Chaer.} 3.3).\textsuperscript{66} The attentive reader of Mark would not have interpreted the disappearance of Jesus’ body from the tomb as an apotheosis, but as a return to the divine realm, not only because of Mark’s emphasis on Jesus’ divine sonship (1:11; 1:24; 5:7; 9:7; 13:32), but also because of the events of the preceding narrative. “Now when the centurion who was standing opposite him saw that he breathed his last in this way, he said, ‘Truly this man was [a/the] son of God’” (Mark 15:39). In fact, the lack of reference to Jesus as “Son of God” in the Empty Tomb story may have been intended to steer the reader away from concluding that Jesus’ disappearance had caused his apotheosis. Instead, in calling Jesus “the crucified one” (τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον), the young man draws attention to the need for vindication, which is supplied by means of the body’s absence, interpreted as Jesus’ return to the divine realm.

It is tempting to wonder whether Q may have made a similar connection between the assumption of Jesus and his divine status. This might not be out of the question, particularly given Q’s relatively high Christology and the fact that, in its final form at least, the title “Son of God” is applied to Jesus (Q 4:3, 9; compare Q 10:21-22). However, Jesus’ assumption appears to signify in Q more a removal to an exalted state in order to await an eschatological office than a return of a divine person to the divine realm (although the two ideas are certainly not mutually exclusive).

\textsuperscript{65} See Lohfink, \textit{Himmelfahrt Jesu}, 48; see also C.H. Talbert, “The Concept of Immortals in Mediterranean Antiquity,” \textit{JBL} 94 (1975): 419-36, with examples, 422-3. Some deliberately sought to effect their own bodily and permanent disappearance in order to ensure their post-mortem veneration as gods. See, for example, Diogenes Laertius, \textit{Lives} 7.66-68 (Empedocles); Arrian, \textit{Anab.} 7.27.3 (Alexander); Herodotus, \textit{Hist.} 4.95 (Zamolxis).