

The Inscriptio of the Gospel Attributed to Matthew

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Introduction

For many Christians the authorial identity behind the first Gospel (as per the Augustinian order), commonly attributed to Matthew usually appears to be a matter of little or no concern. This is in part due to the *inscriptio* of the Gospel itself as is found in most modern translations of the New Testament.¹ Without this *inscriptio*, the first mention of the name Matthew appears in Matthew 9:9. While at first this may not seem like an issue of note, a critical examination of the *inscriptio* with respect to its inception, and eventual adoption and evolution can give us deep insight into the perception of this document by those contemporaneous to its creation and development. Who was authorship ascribed to, if anyone at all in the manuscript tradition? Was it considered to be scripture from inception? How has the use of the *inscriptio* in today's modern translations affected the belief that an individual identified as Matthew did indeed write the first Gospel?

1. The word *inscriptio* is to be understood as title.

The Earliest Manuscript

Ⲙ1 is the earliest extant manuscript of this Gospel.² The papyrus itself measures 130 mm by 250 mm, it contains one column and thirty-seven lines.³ Our interest is limited to the *recto* of the folio which begins at βιβλος from verse 1 and prospectively ends partially into verse 14. The folio contains many lacunae which has rendered anything beyond line 23 largely illegible. The transcription of the first line of the folio presents us with the incipit functioning as the earliest *inscriptio* that is extant.

1 | βιβλος γενεσεως ιω χυ υυ δαυιδ [υιου]

1 | Book of genealogy of Jesus Christ son of David son

2 | αβρααμ αβρααμ εγεννησεν τον ισαακ

2 | Abraham Abraham begat Isaac⁴

The title of this book as described by the scribe of Ⲙ1 would therefore be, “The Book of the Genealogy of Jesus Christ the Son of David, the son of Abraham.” The earliest extant title of the book would therefore indicate that there was no authorship ascribed to the book itself and that the later titles, which we shall examine, that eventually ascribed some form of divinity with the book’s authorship were a product of its eventual development and not intended by its earliest scribes to read as such.

2. Brannan, Rick, ed. *New Testament Manuscript Explorer*. Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2015.

3. Ibid.

4. "Matt inscriptio-1:11." Manuscript Workspace - INTF. Accessed October 28, 2017. <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/manuscript-workspace/?docID=10001>. While the manuscript contains majuscule Koine text the transcriptions available use minuscule text.

The Ascription to Matthew in the Manuscript Record

It should be noted that Codex Sinaiticus is generally seen as contemporaneous to Codex Vaticanus.⁵ The first uses of Matthew as an *inscriptio* in the manuscript record is found in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. Scholarship notes that this development may have initially occurred in Codex Vaticanus, with Codex Sinaiticus being emended by a later corrector to match the style of Codex Vaticanus.⁶ With respect to Codex Sinaiticus the *inscriptio* and *subscriptio* for each Gospel is tabulated as follows:⁷

Gospel	Inscriptio	Inscriptio Folio	Subscriptio	Subscriptio Folio
Matthew	KATA MAΘΘΑΙΟΝ	200 Recto		217 Recto
Mark	KATA ΜΑΡΚΟΝ	217 Verso	EΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ KATA ΜΑΡΚΟΝ	228 Recto
Luke	KATA ΛΟΥΚΑΝ	228 Recto	EΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ KATA ΛΟΥΚΑΝ	246 Verso
John	KATA ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ	247 Recto	EΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ KATA ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ	260 Recto

5. "Codex Sinaiticus." Codex Sinaiticus | Catholic Answers. Accessed October 28, 2017. <https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/codex-sinaiticus>.

6. Comfort, Philip Wesley. *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary: Commentary on the Variant Readings of the Ancient New Testament Manuscripts and How They Relate to the Major English Translations* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2008), 1.

7. "Matt inscriptio; Matt 1:1-25; Matt 2:1-5." Manuscript Workspace - INTF. Accessed October 28, 2017. <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/manuscript-workspace/?docID=10001>. Data was transcribed from the folios available on the INTF's Manuscript Workspace.

For the purposes of this paper the koine word “KATA” is to be understood as meaning “according to”.⁸ A pattern is quickly established where a later corrector of Codex Sinaiticus added an *inscriptio* to each book.⁹ However, a curious case arises when the *subscriptio* of each book is examined. Matthew’s *subscriptio* is completely absent, the folio listed indicates where the *subscriptio* would have been inserted.¹⁰ It should be noted that the absence was not due to the lack of space, indeed the entire fourth column of the folio was empty save for Line 1. On the other hand, each of the remaining books are identified as a “gospel” with the koine word “ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ” being used.¹¹ This would therefore mean that the earliest uncial codex of the New Testament oddly excludes the mention of Matthew’s book as a Gospel. Having passed through the hands of a couple of correctors, it therefore seems peculiar that not one found a reason to correct this noticeable aberration.

8. "Strong's G2596." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed October 28, 2017. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=kjv&strongs=g2596>.

9. "Matt inscriptio; Matt 1:1-25; Matt 2:1-5." Manuscript Workspace - INTF. Accessed October 28, 2017. <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/manuscript-workspace/?docID=10001>.

10. "Matthew, 1:1 - 2:5 library: BL folio: 200 scribe: A." Codex Sinaiticus - See The Manuscript | Matthew |. Accessed October 28, 2017. <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/manuscript.aspx?book=33&lid=en&side=r&zoomSlider=0>.

11. "2098. euaggelion." Strong's Greek: 2098. εὐαγγέλιον (euaggelion) -- good news. Accessed October 28, 2017. <http://biblehub.com/greek/2098.htm>.

The question which then comes to mind is when was the earliest koine ascription of holiness to indicate divine inspiration for the *inscriptio* of Matthew's Gospel? The earliest dated use of the koine term for "holy", which is "ΑΓΙΟΝ"¹² are Codex M (Campionus) from the 9th century and *f*¹ which is a family of manuscripts dating from the 12th to 14th centuries respectively.¹³ The Nestle-Aland GNT 28 indicates that a Bohairic manuscript also includes the use of "holy" in the *inscriptio* for Matthew.¹⁴

Text	Century	Manuscript
None	3 rd	Ⲣ1
KATA MAΘΘΑΙΟΝ	4 th	01 (Sinaiticus)
EΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΤΘΑΙΟΝ	5 th	05 (Bezae)
ΑΓΙΟΝ ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΘΘΑΙΟΝ	9 th	M (Campionus)

12. "39. hagian." Strong's Greek: 39. ἅγιον (hagian) -- holy place, sanctuary. Accessed October 28, 2017. <http://biblehub.com/greek/39.htm>.

13. Nestle, Eberhard, Erwin Nestle, Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, and Holger Strutwolf. *Novum Testamentum Graece* (3rd ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), 1.

14. Ibid.

Use of the Title to Prove Authorship in Modern Apologetics

A striking example of modern Christian apologists attempting to use the title of the Gospel as an evidence of its authorship can be seen in this quote from a popular apologetics online resource:

In addition, scholars acknowledge that Matthew's name was associated with the First Gospel from the earliest times. The writers of the CSB Study Bible denote that "the title that ascribes this Gospel to Matthew appears in the earliest manuscripts and is possibly original. Titles became necessary to distinguish one Gospel from another when the four Gospels began to circulate as a single collection."¹⁵

The claim in this article is wholly wrong as is evidenced by our study and examination of the earliest manuscripts on the *inscriptio* for what is known today as Matthew's Gospel. The name Matthew is not found as a "title" in the earliest manuscript, which would be $\mathfrak{B}1$. The phrase "earliest manuscripts" as given by the CSB Study Bible would be incorrect and should perhaps be altered to reflect this discrepancy. One means of correction would be to state "some of the earliest" while also mentioning that there is roughly a century's gap between $\mathfrak{B}1$ which is "the earliest" and the later uncial codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. This common misconception of the title as a proof of authorship has been addressed in several easily accessible commentaries. One such commentary is Gill's Exposition which states:

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ,.... This is the genuine title of the book, which was put to it by the Evangelist himself; for the former seems to be done by another hand.¹⁶

15. Chilton, Brian . "Who Wrote the Gospel of Matthew?" Cross Examined - Christian Apologetic Ministry | Frank Turek | Christian Apologetics | Christian Apologetics Speakers. June 12, 2017. Accessed October 28, 2017. <http://crossexamined.org/wrote-gospel-matthew/>.

Another commentary as found on the same website also mentions the issue of the *inscriptio*:

The book of the generation - This is the proper title of the chapter. It is the same as to say, "the account of the ancestry or family, or the genealogical table of Jesus Christ."¹⁷

Conclusion

The evolution of the title of the first Gospel is quite a curious one. While this study did not undertake an assessment of the patristic references to the Gospel's authorship, the manuscript tradition of the Gospel's *inscriptio* clearly demonstrates a century by century development of the identity of its proposed author.¹⁸ The earliest extant witness does not name the author, the uncial codices do name the author but later emend the *inscriptio* in two stages which eventually resulted in the common use of referring to the Gospel as the "Holy Gospel According to Matthew" which has been shown to be a primarily medieval development. The apologetic misuse of the *inscriptio* and the consequences of such inaccurate claims do not affect the overall reliability of the Gospel in its 3rd century vorlage-archetypal form but demonstrates a willingness to embellish the historical record as time progresses.

16. "Matthew 1:1." Matthew 1:1 Commentaries: The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:. Accessed October 28, 2017. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/1-1.htm>.

17. Ibid.

18. Ehrman, Bart. "The Gospels are Finally Named! Irenaeus of Lyons." The Bart Ehrman Blog. November 18, 2014. Accessed October 28, 2017. <https://ehrmanblog.org/the-gospels-are-finally-named-irenaeus-of-lyons/>. While Church history is important in providing context to textual critical developments of the New Testament, the scope of this study is restricted to the scriptural manuscript tradition of the New Testament.

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"Strong's G2596." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed October 28, 2017.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=kjv&strongs=g2596>.