

WEIGHING T.J. WEEDEN'S CRITIQUE OF KENNETH BAILEY'S  
APPROACH TO ORAL TRADITION IN THE GOSPELS

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The late Kenneth Bailey wrote several helpful articles supporting the flexibility but essential reliability of oral tradition in a Middle Eastern context.<sup>1</sup> In these articles he draws on some published collections of proverbs but especially on the emphasis on careful memory in Middle Eastern culture. His examples include Qur'an and poetry memorization, Syrian Orthodox liturgy and observations by himself and others over the course of four decades. Bailey's work has influenced the approaches of N.T. Wright, James D.G. Dunn and others.<sup>2</sup> Wright insists that 'Until it is shown that the process Bailey envisages is historically impossible, I propose that it be taken as a working model'.<sup>3</sup>

Some scholars, not surprisingly, have therefore set out to refute Bailey's thesis. Most foundational is the critique by Theodore J. Weeden, undertaken partly because Weeden recognizes Bailey's influence on Wright and Dunn.<sup>4</sup> Weeden challenges many of the details

1. Kenneth E. Bailey, 'Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels', *AsJT* 5 (1991), pp. 34-54 (hereafter 'Tradition' [*AsJT*]); *idem*, 'Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels', *Them* 20 (1995), pp. 4-11 (hereafter 'Tradition' [*Them*]); *idem*, 'Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels', *ExpT* 106 (1995), pp. 363-67 (hereafter 'Tradition' [*ExpT*]). The later *Them* article slightly revises the earlier *AsJT* one.

2. See e.g. N.T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God. II. Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 133-37; James D.G. Dunn, *The Oral Gospel Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), pp. 2, 52-53, 59, 205, 219, 239, 279, 320, 322; Terence C. Mournet, *Oral Tradition and Literary Dependency: Variability and Stability in the Synoptic Tradition and Q* (WUNT 2.195; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 187-90, 292.

3. Wright, *Victory*, p. 136.

4. Theodore J. Weeden, Sr, 'Kenneth Bailey's Theory of Oral Tradition: A Theory Contested by Its Evidence', *JSHJ* 7 (2009), pp. 3-43 (4). This influence is

of Bailey's argument, probably most potently when he questions Bailey's proposed setting for passing on tradition (the *haflat samar*, a festive evening gathering that includes storytelling) and Bailey's traditions about nineteenth-century missionary John Hogg. Although Dunn helpfully responded immediately to Weeden's critique (they appeared in the same issue of the same journal),<sup>5</sup> he did so more generically than in detail, and some circles still cite Weeden's response as a decisive refutation of Bailey's approach.<sup>6</sup>

Weeden has performed a valuable service by highlighting problems in some of Bailey's specific examples. My ultimate concern here, however, is not Bailey's particular examples as such, but in what a reading of Weeden's critique in isolation might mislead one to suppose that Weeden has disproved. Some of Bailey's examples were weaker than others, but Bailey was correct in his overall sense that traditional Middle Eastern culture could standardize and accurately pass on key traditions about leading community figures.

Although ancient sources regarding memory are more relevant chronologically than Bailey's approach,<sup>7</sup> they stem disproportionately from literate elites, whereas Bailey's approach, while risking anachronism, provides a helpful control in this respect. Clearly at least some aspects of the traditional culture persisted in rural areas for

also noted by e.g. Eric Eve, *Behind the Gospels: Understanding the Oral Tradition* (London: SPCK, 2013), p. 66.

5. James D.G. Dunn, 'Kenneth Bailey's Theory of Oral Tradition: Critiquing Theodore Weeden's Critique', *JSHJ* 7 (2009), pp. 44-62 (reprinted in *idem*, *Oral Gospel Tradition*, pp. 248-64).

6. Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior* (New York: HarperOne, 2016), p. 71. Others, however, have offered more balanced appraisals; see e.g. John S. Kloppenborg, 'Memory, Performance, and the Sayings of Jesus', in Karl Galinsky (ed.), *Memory in Ancient Rome and Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 286-323 (300-303).

7. See e.g. Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 141-52; cf. *idem*, 'Before Biographies: Memory and Oral Tradition', in Craig S. Keener and Edward T. Wright (eds.), *Biographies and Jesus: What Does It Mean for the Gospels to be Biographies?* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2016), pp. 329-54 (335-47).

millennia until the late twentieth century, which Bailey illustrates by noting Syrian village architectural patterns.<sup>8</sup>

I am not suggesting that we embrace Bailey's model wholesale. Although oral traditions can become increasingly distorted over generations, especially after the stage of living memory of the figures whom they depict, the conditions that Bailey described would be relevant in any case only to the first generation, and probably to the first decades, of the Jesus movement. Even then, Bailey's evidence often teaches us more about the persistence of traditional memory in a Middle Eastern setting (and thus about the early gospel tradition) than about the particulars of the settings in which the gospel tradition was transmitted. The urban church in Jerusalem (Rom. 15.25-26; Gal. 1.17-18; 2.1) would have experienced different conditions than Galilean villages. This distinction, however, is not the focus of Weeden's critique.

#### *Bailey's Expertise*

Citing Weeden's argument, some scholars today too quickly dismiss Bailey as inadequately qualified academically. For example, in a 2016 work Bart Ehrman characterizes Kenneth Bailey and Theodore Weeden in contrasting ways. The former is 'an author named Kenneth Bailey' and 'not himself a specialist in the New Testament',<sup>9</sup> whereas the latter is 'a very perceptive New Testament scholar'.<sup>10</sup>

Although Weeden and thus Ehrman are right to take Bailey to task where his information is incorrect or irrelevant, Ehrman's initial framing of the question in terms of relative expertise is problematic. Bailey was chair of the biblical department at the Near East School of Theology, Beirut,<sup>11</sup> and at various times taught at Dubuque,

8. See e.g. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*AsJT*), p. 34; *idem*, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 363, noting also Charles Glass, *Tribes with Flags: A Journey Curtailed* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1990), pp. 156-57.

9. Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels*, p. 71. Ehrman does acknowledge Bailey's 'extensive experience' in the Middle East.

10. Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels*, p. 76. Ehrman's reference 'to another story' seems to differentiate two tellings of what Weeden and his source take to refer to the same story.

11. Perhaps his position as chair of this department indicates a further connection between Bailey and Presbyterian missionary John Hogg, who had once declined a professorship at Beirut College (Rena L. Hogg, *A Master-Builder on the*

McCormick and Fuller Seminaries. Although his work had its detractors, it was warmly endorsed by some, including Markus Barth.<sup>12</sup>

James F. McGrath's review of Ehrman's book in *RBL*<sup>13</sup> also notes the unfairness of Ehrman's characterization, mentioning Bailey's ThD dissertation on Lukan parables and his membership in SNTS. Likewise, Robert K. McIver, whose thorough academic study of memory does not appear in Ehrman's academically informed but somewhat more popular work, characterizes Bailey quite differently, in light of 'his forty-year experience observing Middle Eastern culture as a teacher of New Testament in Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine'.<sup>14</sup> Although McIver does not fully follow Bailey, he finds his observations useful. In Bailey's own articles, meanwhile, he seems humbler about his knowledge of New Testament studies than do his critics about their own secondhand forays into Middle Eastern culture.

More importantly, the larger issue at hand in this case is not one's command of the secondary literature on New Testament scholarship, but one's acquaintance with Middle Eastern practice—with which Bailey had more than four decades of experience.<sup>15</sup> Apart from New Testament scholars *from* traditional Middle Eastern villages before modern media saturation, we are unlikely to see the likes of someone with Bailey's particular competence again, and we therefore do well to consider his observations.

Some point out that one cannot dismiss the relevance of Bailey's knowledge of traditional Middle Eastern culture for understanding the Gospels without also dismissing, for example, the value of New Testament scholarship that specializes in 'Mediterranean cultural

*Nile: Being a Record of the Life and Aims of John Hogg, Christian Missionary* [New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1914], p. 180).

12. This detail comes from Markus Barth's endorsement on the back cover of Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

13. James F. McGrath, review of *Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior* (New York: HarperOne, 2016), by Bart D. Ehrman, in *RBL* (February 2017).

14. Robert K. McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and the Synoptic Gospels* (SBLRBS, 59; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), p. 115.

15. On which see Bailey, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 363. Contrary to the impression one might gain from some of Bailey's detractors, his church affiliations (ordained in the Presbyterian Church, USA; Theologian in Residence in the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East) do not correspond to fundamentalism.

anthropology'.<sup>16</sup> Scholars who emphasize oral tradition sometimes find Bailey's concrete observations particularly consistent with their more general research on the topic.<sup>17</sup>

Diane King, a professor of anthropology at the University of Kentucky specializing in traditional Middle Eastern oral tradition, observed to me that Bailey was at his best when describing ethnographically what he saw around him; that is what ethnographers are supposed to do.<sup>18</sup> Bailey's decades as a participant observer in traditional Middle Eastern culture would have given him familiarity with local practices. This is true regardless of what one makes of Bailey's specific accounts about John Hogg, Bailey's most disputed illustration and the most cogent element of Weeden's critique. Although some of Bailey's illustrations prove unfortunate, his overall sense that the essential core of stories generally persists in Middle Eastern memory seems to hold true at least within living memory.<sup>19</sup>

Professor King notes her own quarter-century of experience with oral memory in Kurdistan, receiving essentially the same information throughout that period. She notes that informants at the earliest stage of recounting sometimes omit reference to key details that are widely known. She also notes that a special emphasis on and therefore skill for memory characterized older Middle Eastern culture, but that this emphasis has declined precipitously even in a single generation in the wake of the younger generation's attachment to technology.<sup>20</sup> After living memory, of course, the floating gap between this and general

16. Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, p. 84. Here one thinks of works by, for example, Bruce Malina, Jerome Neyrey, John Pilch and others.

17. E.g. Mournet, *Tradition*, pp. 187-91.

18. Personal consultation with Diane King, Wilmore, Kentucky, 14 March 2017.

19. For the usual reliability in oral cultures of core recollections within living memory, see e.g. Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 192-93; cf. Chris Keith, 'Prolegomena on the Textualization of Mark's Gospel: Manuscript Culture, the Extended Situation, and the Emergence of the Written Gospel', in Tom Thatcher (ed.), *Memory and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity: A Conversation with Barry Schwartz* (Semeia, 78; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), pp. 161-86 (170), citing Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies* (trans. Rodney Livingstone; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 3-30.

20. This point also comes from our discussion regarding this issue, 14 March 2017.

memory of the distant past can introduce significant revisions in social memory.<sup>21</sup>

### *Living Memory*

The relatively few decades between Jesus' ministry and the first-century Gospels reduce the relevance of some studies concerning the limitations of multigenerational oral tradition.<sup>22</sup> This is not a claim that no variation occurs; for two clear cases of wide variation, note Judas' death<sup>23</sup> and Jesus' genealogy.<sup>24</sup> But any survey of a synopsis of the Gospels will also illustrate the great extent of overlap among the Synoptic Gospels. Because this issue will recur below, it bears discussion here.

Memory theorists often distinguish 'cultural' and 'communicative' memory; 'The latter is characterized by direct communication with a time frame of three to four generations or some eighty to a hundred years.'<sup>25</sup> The phrase 'living memory' (or 'communicative memory')

21. She observes this transition in Diane E. King, *Kurdistan on the Global Stage: Kinship, Land, and Community in Iraq* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), pp. 94-96 (cf. also pp. 66, 68, 187-88; Diane E. King and Linda Stone, 'Lineal Masculinity: Gendered Memory Within Patriliney', *American Ethnologist* 37 [2010], pp. 323-36 [328-29]). The floating gap terminology stems from Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, pp. 23-24, 168-69, 226 n. 10; cf. also pp. 122, 177.

22. Cf. also W.D. Davies, *Invitation to the New Testament: A Guide to Its Main Witnesses* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), p. 116; E.P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (SNTSMS, 9; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 28; Pierre Benoit, *Jesus and the Gospel*. I. (trans. Benet Weatherhead; New York: Herder & Herder, 1973), p. 33; Dunn, *Oral Gospel Tradition*, pp. 234-35, 314; Barry Schwartz, 'Where There's Smoke, There's Fire: Memory and History', in Tom Thatcher (ed.), *Memory and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity: A Conversation with Barry Schwartz* (Semeia, 78; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), pp. 7-37 (14).

23. Mt. 27.5; Acts 1.18; Papias frag. 18.1-7 (Holmes).

24. Mt. 1.2-16; Lk. 3.24-38.

25. Karl Galinsky, 'Introduction', in Karl Galinsky (ed.), *Memory in Ancient Rome and Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 1-39 (12). See Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 6, 19, 35-38 (esp. 36); *idem*, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, pp. 3-30; Keith, 'Prolegomena', p. 170; Alan Kirk, 'Memory Theory and Jesus Research', in Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical*

refers to a period when events can be remembered by some people who are still alive.

Scholars usually limit oral history (as opposed to oral tradition) to the period of living memory,<sup>26</sup> although some regard the distinction between the two as too rigid.<sup>27</sup> Today, for example, living memory would include accounts from elderly survivors of the Nazi Holocaust of persons they remember from before the death camps,<sup>28</sup> or the recollections of South Africans forcibly relocated to enforce apartheid.<sup>29</sup> Within living memory, traditions tend to remain fairly reliable in most cases.<sup>30</sup> The most significant frailties of oral tradition,

*Jesus*. I. *How to Study the Historical Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 809-42 (840-41); Dunn, *Oral Gospel Tradition*, p. 236.

26. E.g. James H. Morrison, 'A Global Perspective of Oral History in Southeast Asia', in Patricia Pui Huen Lim, Chong Guan Kwa and James H. Morrison (eds.), *Oral History in Southeast Asia: Theory and Method* (Pasir Panjang, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998), pp. 1-16 (2); Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memories* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), p. xi; S.P. Field, 'Developing Dialogues: The Value of Oral History', in Robert Holton and William Richard Nasson (eds.), *World Civilizations and History of Human Development* (Oxford: EOLSS Publications, 2009), pp. 268-78 (269). Even the history of medicine now often takes into account oral sources if they lie within living memory; see Michelle Winslow and Graham Smith, 'Ethical Challenges in the Oral History of Medicine', in Donald A. Ritchie (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 372-92 (372).

27. Some contend that oral history and tradition overlap, inviting greater consideration in the social context of the former (Samuel Byrskog, 'The Eyewitnesses as Interpreters of the Past: Reflections on Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*', *JSHJ* 6 [2008], pp. 157-68 [159]); cf. the nuanced position of Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, p. 1.

28. E.g. Andor Schwartz, *Living Memory* (Melbourne: Black, 2010); Esther Jilovsky, *Remembering the Holocaust: Generations, Witnessing and Place* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 103.

29. Sean Field, *Lost Communities, Living Memories: Remembering Forced Removals in Cape Town* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002); *idem*, *Oral History, Community, and Displacement: Imagining Memories in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

30. Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, pp. 192-93, 197; cf. Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), pp. 161-88; Alan Kirk, 'The Memory-Tradition Nexus in the Synoptic Tradition: Memory, Media, and Symbolic Representation', in Tom Thatcher (ed.), *Memory and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity: A Conversation*

observes oral historian Jan Vansina, are not very relevant ‘for data that are less than a few generations old’.<sup>31</sup>

The exclusively oral period for the Jesus tradition is at the longest the period between Jesus’ disappearance and the publication of Mark, that is, roughly four decades.<sup>32</sup> Publication of Jesus’ story therefore began well within the period of living memory. Many follow Jan Assmann’s view that a crisis of tradition occurs roughly four decades after the remembered events; as the eyewitness generation begins to pass, memory must be passed on in other forms to survive.<sup>33</sup> This may help explain the appearance of written Gospels around this period (cf. Lk. 1.1).<sup>34</sup>

Weeden seems less cognizant of this difference between living memory and long-range community memory, given his own creative approach to Mark’s Gospel, usually dated to roughly four decades after the events that Mark depicts.<sup>35</sup> (I comment further on Weeden’s own methodology below.)

with Barry Schwartz (Semeia, 78; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), pp. 131-59 (144), citing Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 6th edn, 1992), pp. 50-56, 218-21; Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall, *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus; Frankfurt: Fischer, 2002).

31. Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, p. 173.

32. Scholars usually date Mark c. 64–75 CE, with 70 being a common median date; for dates from 65–70, see e.g. Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 3rd edn, 2004), p. 82; Robert A. Spivey, D. Moody Smith and C. Clifton Black, *Anatomy of the New Testament* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 6th edn, 2007), pp. 60-61; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), pp. 11-14.

33. Many cite Assmann, *Gedächtnis*, pp. 11, 218-21; see further Kirk, ‘Memory Theory and Jesus Research’, pp. 824, 840-41; Dunn, *Oral Gospel Tradition*, pp. 236-37; Keith, ‘Prolegomena’, pp. 170-71.

34. See Keith, ‘Prolegomena’.

35. E.g. Theodore J. Weeden, Sr, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 118, 122-23, 133. Weeden sometimes indulges in speculations that contradict known customs of the era (e.g. p. 104). Weeden does rightly compare Mark with the popular biography and historiography of his era, though also importing drama (Weeden, *Traditions*, pp. 15-17); but ancient biographies of recent characters often preserved substantial material. See the numerous studies in Keener and Wright (eds.), *Biographies and Jesus*.



Yet even Bailey himself does not usually focus on the distinction. Although the claim is strictly irrelevant for an analogy with the Gospels, Bailey cites examples of traditions that he believes were preserved for centuries, some even back to the fourth century. Weeden understandably questions Bailey's knowledge of how some of his illustrations go back to the fourth century.<sup>36</sup> Without entering that debate, it at least should be recognized that Bailey's illustration reflects a setting primarily relevant many centuries before Bailey's own time, and therefore presumably far older than Bailey's own time. Occasionally written records do exist that support a core of oral tradition going back half a millennium or more.<sup>37</sup>

Some cultures do orally pass on some core information for generations, maintaining accuracy in the points transmitted.<sup>38</sup> Even in the transmission of Balkan ballads, the basic story line is fixed at the oral stage long before the words are fixed at the written stage.<sup>39</sup> Oral

36. Even ancient thinkers recognized that centuries of oral tradition breed variants, even in poetry; regarding Homer, see Josephus, *Apion* 1.12; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 9.12.113. For the accumulation of problems in oral tradition over time, see e.g. Robert Harms, 'Oral Tradition and Ethnicity', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10 (1979), pp. 61-85; Freddy Raphael, 'Le travail de la memoire et les limites de l'histoire orale', *Annales* 35 (1980), pp. 127-45; Esther Iglesias, 'Reflexoes sobre o quefazer da historia oral no mundo rural', *Dados* 27 (1984), pp. 59-70; David Henige, 'African History and the Rule of Evidence: Is Declaring Victory Enough', in Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (eds.), *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?* (SSAMD, 12; Beverly Hills: Sage, 1986), pp. 91-104 (103).

37. Note the Ethiopian case of Bamo in Vansina, *Tradition*, p. 188; see some very rare yet compelling examples for thousands of years in Elizabeth Wayland Barber and Paul T. Barber, *When They Severed Earth from Sky: How the Human Mind Shapes Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 7-8 (nearly 7700 years), 9 (more than one thousand; cf. p. 217); cf. pp. 144, 155, 244.

38. Bernard Lewis, *History Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975), p. 43; Jan Vansina, 'Afterthoughts on the Historiography of Oral Tradition', in Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (eds.), *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?* (SSAMD, 12; Beverly Hills: Sage, 1986), pp. 105-10 (110); Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), pp. 239-68 (esp. 252-59).

39. Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), p. 138. Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels*, p. 185, rightly notes Lord's observation that details remain fluid while the gist remains the same.

performances generate much variation in detail,<sup>40</sup> perhaps explaining a number of variants in our gospel tradition as well.<sup>41</sup> Tradents frequently lack verbatim recall, especially (as Bailey would admit) in prose;<sup>42</sup> despite a few apparent exceptions,<sup>43</sup> verbatim recall is virtually impossible to test and almost impossible to sustain without written texts.<sup>44</sup> They often re-create material<sup>45</sup> and typically adapt

40. E.g. Jean Bazin, 'The Past in the Present: Notes on Oral Archaeology', in Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (eds.), *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?* (SSAMD, 12; Beverly Hills: Sage, 1986), pp. 59-74 (70-71).

41. James D.G. Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), pp. 112 (with 110), 118, 122; cf. Albert B. Lord, 'The Gospels as Oral Traditional Literature', in William O. Walker, Jr (ed.), *The Relationships Among the Gospels: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1978), pp. 33-91.

42. See e.g. George A. Kennedy, 'Classical and Christian Source Criticism', in William O. Walker, Jr (ed.), *The Relationships Among the Gospels: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1978), pp. 125-55 (143); Kloppenborg, 'Memory', pp. 291, 318. Ancient audiences would not expect verbatim presentation; paraphrase was even a deliberate rhetorical exercise (Theon, *Progymn.* 1.93-171 [Butts]).

43. See Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 73-86, 142; *idem*, *Literacy and Orality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 90, 158, 166-67, 172-73 (although she defines accuracy more generally than do her detractors); Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1982), pp. 61-63; Samuel Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority and Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism and the Matthean Community* (ConBNT, 24; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994), pp. 323-24.

44. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry*, p. 140; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 56-57; David Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-Out Rhymes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 7, 319; Jocelyn Penny Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 7, 192; McIver, *Memory*, p. 120; see further Ian M.L. Hunter, 'Lengthy Verbatim Recall: The Role of Text', in Andrew W. Ellis (ed.), *Progress in the Psychology of Language* (London: Erlbaum, 1985), pp. 207-35.

45. See e.g. Henri Moniot, 'Profile of a Historiography: Oral Tradition and Historical Research in Africa', in Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (eds.), *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?* (SSAMD, 12; Beverly Hills: Sage, 1986), pp. 50-58 (56-57).

performances for new audiences.<sup>46</sup> The gist, however, frequently persists.<sup>47</sup> Frequent persistence of the gist in oral tradition tends to support, *a fortiori*, the preservability of anecdotes from within living memory.

### *John Hogg*

Weeden raises legitimate questions, however, regarding some of Bailey's examples of modern oral tradition, giving special attention to his citation of stories about nineteenth-century Protestant missionary John Hogg. Stories that Bailey heard about John Hogg from 1955–65 were from seventy to eighty years after Hogg's death—a period that could be regarded as toward the end of living memory. Some of the stories themselves derived from earlier in Hogg's ministry and hence were transmitted for an even longer period.<sup>48</sup> Bailey even met a surviving witness of Hogg's ministry.<sup>49</sup> Hogg's notoriety is not surprising; he founded much of Egypt's Protestant church. Bailey notes that a local story might survive at most half a century, so long as those who were teens during an incident survived, but stories might persist for two or three generations for leading families in a community and even longer for its founders.<sup>50</sup>

46. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 65; Bazin, 'Past', pp. 70-71.

47. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 327, 333-34, 345; Dale C. Allison, Jr, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), pp. 8 n. 46, 11-13; Robert K. McIver, 'Eyewitnesses as Guarantors of the Accuracy of the Gospel Traditions in the Light of Psychological Research', *JBL* 131 (2012), pp. 529-46 (545-46); Kloppenborg, 'Memory', pp. 289-94.

48. Weeden, 'Theory', p. 7, adopts the figure of ninety years (see Bailey, 'Tradition' [*ExpT*], p. 366), which some place beyond living memory, especially given ancient lifespans (though a few persons did live into old age; see examples in Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003], pp. 102-103). One oral memory about Hogg, which Bailey reports comes from 91 years after the putative incident (Bailey, 'Tradition' [*Them*], p. 8; *idem*, 'Tradition' [*AsJT*], p. 46), seems more plausible as a recollection than as a fiction, and includes a taunt song that could be less susceptible to variation.

49. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 366. Bailey does not relate the extent of content or impressions received from the witness, who was undoubtedly young when John Hogg passed.

50. *Idem*, 'Tradition' (*Them*), p. 9; *idem*, 'Tradition' (*AsJT*), p. 49.

Weeden's strongest critique involves Bailey's report of John Hogg's encounter with robbers,<sup>51</sup> eighty-two to ninety-two years before Bailey heard it,<sup>52</sup> although he also addresses one of Bailey's other illustrations from Hogg (which I will treat first). Weeden is correct to challenge the idea that all key elements of a story are passed along without much change, although this criticism may focus on some of Bailey's statements to the exclusion of Bailey's larger context. If Bailey may overemphasize similarities among accounts, however, Weeden sometimes overemphasizes differences. Although John Hogg's daughter Rena believed that the story that she heard in 1910 included inaccurate elements, Bailey is also right that the tradition he encountered is quite similar to the one that Rena Hogg heard.

To distinguish between the two Hoggs, John the subject and his daughter Rena the author, I shall hereafter usually designate them by their first names.

#### *The Urinating Incident*

Weeden challenges Bailey's accuracy regarding 'the urinating incident'.<sup>53</sup> Weeden believes that Bailey and Rena Hogg refer to the same incident. But given that Rena recounts that 'filth' was 'not infrequently' hurled at John,<sup>54</sup> it is not impossible that the 'vile water' of Rena's account and the urine in Bailey's account refer to distinct incidents. If Weeden is correct to assume that they are the same story, however, he nevertheless argues too much based on Rena's omissions. She is not recounting an entire story; she offers merely part of a sentence! This story fragment includes too few details to speak of contradictions except in terms of the venue.<sup>55</sup>

Even in the brief anecdotes, some differences do appear. In Bailey's version, the aggressor urinates from the roof, and in Hogg's version, he pours the liquid through a gap in the ceiling (although women hurled dirt and bricks from another roof until John and his audience moved).<sup>56</sup>

51. Also noted in Dunn, 'Theory', p. 51.

52. It occurred in 1873.

53. Weeden, 'Theory', pp. 9-11; cf. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*AsJT*), p. 46; Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 214.

54. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 214. Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, p. 75, adds the possibility that John himself may have originated the more euphemistic expression.

55. Cf. also Dunn, 'Theory', p. 50.

56. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 228.

When recounting a story, a person who was not an eyewitness may recount the story the way they envisioned it when they heard it, wrongly believing this detail to be an original part of the story,<sup>57</sup> so variation on such a detail is not surprising.<sup>58</sup> In both cases the fluid descends, and in many dwellings in this region a person above a room would have been on a roof.<sup>59</sup>

The other difference could be merely an omission. The conversion of the village mayor in Bailey's version could be hagiography (as perhaps are the conversions in one account about the robbers). Because hostile critics and mayors have been converted in other settings, however, and because Rena does not offer any detail, we cannot be certain about this verdict.<sup>60</sup> Certainly John did successfully found churches with many converts in that region,<sup>61</sup> as Rena's testimony at other points confirms.

#### *Oral Traditions of the 'Robbers' Incident*

So far as we can tell from Bailey's report, the gist of the oral tradition about John Hogg and the robbers seems to have changed little between 1910 and the time that Bailey heard it a generation later (more precisely, 45-55 years later). This evidence supports Bailey's case about oral transmission. The *original* story on which both were based, however, warns us that what is orally transmitted may not always be correct historical information. Some key changes in the story may even go back to the telling of one of the eyewitnesses.

57. For this feature of memory, see e.g. Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels*, pp. 93-94. The brain's elaboration of a story may also become associated with the original memory during recollection, as noted in Barber and Barber, *Severed Earth*, p. 33, following Jeremy Campbell, *The Improbable Machine* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 225.

58. One could also imagine the general architectural accuracy of both stories if someone moved from a roof to a courtyard stairwell or the aperture above a courtyard ladder.

59. Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, pp. 75-76.

60. Cf. Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, p. 76. Conflict with a 'village mayor' also appears in passing in Bailey, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 366, albeit without mention of the conversion. In a small community such as a village, a mayor may be more accessible.

61. *Idem*, 'Tradition' (*AsJT*), p. 45, cites him as 'the founder of many of the protestant churches in the south of Egypt' and 'the primary founder of the new Egyptian Evangelical community'.

The robbers story as told by Bailey's informants and Rena Hogg's informants is the only narrative account that clearly overlaps between both of these sources.<sup>62</sup> Weeden is correct to note that the stories include both similarities and differences. Yet the stories appear *substantially* the same, despite the four to five intervening decades, assuming that Bailey's account of similarities with Hogg's means all that it can mean,<sup>63</sup> and that he correctly remembered and recounted the traditions that he had heard.<sup>64</sup> If we leave aside omissions, which again do not speak for or against the reliability of details in a different account,<sup>65</sup> we find many points in common:

62. It might be only with respect to this story that Bailey means that he and Rena Hogg both 'dipped into this same oral tradition'; see Bailey, 'Tradition' (*Them*), pp. 8, 9; *idem*, 'Tradition' (*AsJT*), pp. 46-47, though he speaks of being 'exposed to this same tradition' also with more general reference to stories about Hogg (Bailey, 'Tradition' [*AsJT*], p. 46).

63. The similarities are so great that they either indicate very close traditions reported independently or simply that, much more likely, Bailey is recounting Hogg's version and noting that his is quite similar ('told in almost the same way') ('Tradition' [*Them*], p. 9). Bailey may be exaggerating the extent of precise verbal agreement. That he reduces his original 90 per cent figure of verbatim preservation to 80 per cent in his 1995 *Them* article, as Weeden notes ('Theory', p. 27 n. 21), might argue against deliberate exaggeration. We cannot take his estimates very precisely, however; he repeats the 90 per cent figure again in his *ExpT* article (p. 366).

64. Bailey probably did not take the sort of careful field notes an ethnographer or other anthropologist would; he himself seems predisposed toward relying on the traditional Middle Eastern value of memory. Nevertheless, the similarity that he claims between his remembered report and the one that he found in Hogg appears to be more than coincidence. Moreover, Bailey retold these stories over the years in roughly the same form, as some of his hearers attested; Dunn, 'Theory', pp. 55, 57, observes that he heard some of the same historical anecdotes from Bailey in the 1970s. Further, the version Bailey heard could not have depended on the book, since the villagers were unaware of Rena's publication ('Tradition' [*ExpT*], p. 366).

65. Omissions discard data, but technically do not falsify the information that remains (Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, p. 172; cf. p. 188); they may distort the overall picture, but they are not errors per se. For omissions in individual memory, see McIver, *Memory*, p. 48; in ancient biographies, see A.B. Bosworth, *From Arrian to Alexander: Studies in Historical Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 211; Michael R. Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels? What We Can Learn from Ancient Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 2, 20, 51, 56, 72, 75, 77, 95, 109; in ancient historiography, see Polybius 6.11.7-8; R.A. Derrenbacker, Jr, *Ancient Compositional Practices and the Synoptic Problem*

- (1) A band of robbers
- (2) They demanded valuables
- (3) John quickly surrendered his gold watch and money
- (4) He noted that he had a greater treasure to offer
- (5) He pulled out a small book and told them its stories all night
- (6) By morning the band recognized their ways to be wrong and agreed to turn from robbery
- (7) They tried to return Hogg's watch and money
- (8) He accepted the watch but had them keep the money
- (9) He supported them until they could find legal work

By the standards of oral tradition, these accounts are extraordinarily close, too close to be independent. That is, they are variations of not only the same incident but of the same *account*; two independent eyewitnesses would not have selected so many of the same details.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, Weeden regards the differences as major.<sup>67</sup> The three differences he lists all involve the conversion and establishment of the robbers as church members.<sup>68</sup> Strikingly, however, the conversions appear in Rena's oral version<sup>69</sup> rather than Bailey's. That is, Bailey's later version appears less extensive (and closer to the possibly original version) than the one that Rena attributes to the village patriarch decades before Bailey's experience. Rena does note, however, that there were 'many versions' of the story.<sup>70</sup> She apparently heard a more elaborate version, while the simpler version appears to have survived in oral tradition.

(BETS, 186; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), pp. 91, 93; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–15), I, pp. 194–96 (including Josephus, *Life* 339; *Apion* 1.60–66; Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 1.1.1–2).

66. A principle observed more generally in source criticism of ancient writers; see e.g. Derrenbacher, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, p. 89. In oral history, independence would be needed in order to provide multiple attestations to an event (Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, p. 159).

67. Dunn, 'Theory', p. 51, also notes this problem with Weeden's complaint that the 'urinating incident' descriptions do 'not exactly match'; this complaint 'ignores the character of oral tradition', which tells the story in different ways and does not concern itself with exact matches.

68. Weeden, 'Theory', p. 15.

69. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 215.

70. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 214. Variant versions of traditions are not uncommon; see Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, p. 153.

*Firsthand Accounts versus the Robbers Tale*

Given that Rena Hogg recounts a particular version of the story from a Christian village's 'fine old patriarch',<sup>71</sup> one might expect the account of the robbers joining the church to be accurate. The patriarch, after all, is recounting the stories just a generation after the putative incident occurred, and he might be familiar with church members in the area and their families.

Rena, however, demurs; she speaks of the mingling of 'fact and fancy' that grew over the generation.<sup>72</sup> Rena was herself suspicious of local legends;<sup>73</sup> one unfamiliar with her narration might attribute this suspicion to ethnocentric bias,<sup>74</sup> but the rest of her book shows that, by the standards of her era, she did have an appreciation for the local Egyptian culture.<sup>75</sup> In any case, she proceeds to demythologize the story she has heard about her father. She tells differently what she understands as the same story, based on the reports of her father and his younger companion, Shenodeh Hanna.

Assuming, very probably correctly, that her account refers to mostly the same incident,<sup>76</sup> it is not unlikely that the version offered by 'the

71. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, pp. 214-15.

72. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 214. Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, p. 72, prefers to call it 'how fact is transmuted into legend'.

73. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, pp. 13-14, complains that there are legends concerning her father, claiming what remains is a 'tangled mass of fact and fiction'. The legend glamorizes him, she warns, viewing him as like an Egyptian yet 'like an angel from heaven'. As Weeden ('Theory', p. 20) notes, this fits the tendency of oral tradition to idealize past figures. We should note, however, that such idealization as she recounts is primarily hyperbole and a matter of emphasis; Egyptian Presbyterians did not attribute to him miracle stories, extraordinary teachings (far from these, cf. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, pp. 260-73), or the like.

74. Cf. legends growing in 'regions in the Orient'; 'savage tribes' (p. 63); 'evolution of centuries has attained in the West' (p. 149). Conspicuous ethnocentrism appears in the 'injustice' of a daughter of an 'Abyssinian slave' mother and a German father marrying any of her mother's people, given her 'innate superiority' (p. 116).

75. Where she apparently also served; see Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 7. She praises her father for wanting to see Egypt through its people's eyes (p. 255), for supporting a self-governing indigenous church (pp. 173-74; cf. 111) and for combatting slave traders (p. 254; though not colonialism, pp. 248, 254-58).

76. Potentially, Rena could have mistakenly identified two different stories. Nevertheless, similarities in the accounts and Rena's thorough survey of her father's



fine old patriarch' conflates some details with other stories about John, or even reflects a conflation of different elements within the single incident. Such conflation is often observed in both individual<sup>77</sup> and cultural<sup>78</sup> memory; even individual, eyewitness memory is prone to time-slice errors that conflate similar incidents, even over the course of just two and a half years.<sup>79</sup> This is also a common deliberate feature of much storytelling, even in Greco-Roman biography.<sup>80</sup> That a story that involved both John Hogg and Shenodeh Hanna became a story focused only on the former, more prominent figure does fit the nature of known oral tradition.<sup>81</sup> It also was an accepted feature of storytelling even in Greco-Roman biography.<sup>82</sup>

In any case, Rena's version of the story, presumably based on her father's papers, differs from the oral tradition that both she and Bailey report receiving. When it comes to the original story, however, she notes that even the two eyewitnesses—her father and Hanna—differed on some key details. Nevertheless, she regards these 'discrepancies' as 'easily explained' by Hanna's inattention at some points and 'a most natural' (but incorrect) 'inference' on his part. Hanna inferred that the men were robbers, since in fact the area was infested with robbers, but John Hogg offers a different characterization. That is, Rena was ready

correspondence makes this unlikely; she is sure that 'this is the only tale in which robbers figure' (p. 218).

77. Conflating similar incidents in Alan Kirk, 'Memory', in Werner H. Kelber and Samuel Byrskog (eds.), *Jesus in Memory: Traditions in Oral and Scribal Perspectives* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), pp. 155-72 (166); Kloppenborg, 'Memory', p. 289.

78. Reducing repetition and fusing incidents, noted in Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, p. 171; cf. Barber and Barber, *Severed Earth*, p. 115.

79. See McIver, *Memory*, p. 47. Cf. also time-slice errors in William F. Brewer, 'Memory for Randomly Sampled Autobiographical Events', in Ulric Neisser and Eugene Winograd (eds.), *Remembering Reconsidered: Ecological and Traditional Approaches to the Study of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 21-90, as cited in David C. Rubin, 'Introduction', in David C. Rubin (ed.), *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1-15 (4).

80. See Licona, *Differences*, pp. 20, 48, 52, 56, 67, 91, 95, 109.

81. Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, p. 72, who also regards some of the other details of the oral account as simplifications and conflations of details in the original account. In oral tradition generally, e.g. Barber and Barber, *Severed Earth*, p. 124.

82. On 'spotlighting', see Licona, *Differences*, pp. 20, 36, 39, 48, 52, 56, 61, 67, 69, 75, 95-98, 103, 108-109.

to harmonize or explain as honest misunderstandings differences she found in the original accounts that she trusted.

Following are some similarities and differences between the village elder's account and the account that Rena had from John and Hanna. Keep in mind that if these are the same story, Rena may also have lacked some details simply because her father and his colleague did not report them in her source.

1.	<i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> John Hogg and Mr Shenodeh were visiting a host in a village far from Assiut.	<i>The elder:</i> John Hogg was visiting a host in a village far from Assiut, namely Tahta.
<p><i>Similarities:</i> John Hogg was visiting a host in a village far from Assiut.</p> <p><i>Differences:</i> Some omissions</p> <p><i>Possible explanations for differences:</i> The storyteller focuses on the main character; Mr Shenodeh was not as relevant to the story (and probably no longer even known to the teller).</p>		
2.	<i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> They left at night without an escort and got lost en route to their boat at the river.	<i>The elder:</i> John Hogg was unafraid, knowing that the Lord was with him, and so left at night without an escort (only in the elder's story recounted by Rena, not in Bailey).
<p><i>Similarities:</i> John Hogg left at night without an escort.</p> <p><i>Differences:</i> The elder omits Mr Shenodeh and the embarrassment of getting lost.</p> <p><i>Possible explanations for differences:</i> The elder's story highlights Hogg's heroism, imputing honorable motives (none of this appears in Bailey's version).</p>		
3.	<i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> The district was infested with robbers (so Rena).	<i>The elder:</i> The district was infested with robbers.
<p><i>Similarities:</i> The district was infested with robbers.</p> <p><i>Differences:</i> n/a</p> <p><i>Possible explanations for differences:</i> n/a</p>		
4.	<i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> They were misled; they fled from possible pursuers; they were nearly shot;	<i>The elder:</i> There was a band of robbers.

<p>in dangerous circumstances, accosted by dogs, they were received by a group that nearly shot them.</p>	
<p><i>Similarities:</i> Mortal danger at night; a group of men (in Hogg's account, three men and a boy); they came close to being shot.  <i>Differences:</i> Although Mr Shenoodah thought those that received them robbers, John Hogg reported them as simply guarding their land.  <i>Possible explanations for differences:</i> That they were robbers was a legitimate but incorrect inference (so Rena).<sup>83</sup> The line between robbers and other potential aggressors may have been drawn differently by the two witnesses.<sup>84</sup> The retellings simplified and conflated potential pursuers with the dangerous farmers.</p>	
<p>5. <i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> n/a</p>	<p><i>The elder:</i> The group demanded valuables. John Hogg quickly surrendered his gold watch and money.</p>
<p><i>Similarities:</i> John and Mr Shenoodah faced danger.  <i>Differences:</i> Rena reports no demands for or surrender of valuables.  <i>Possible explanations for differences:</i> Storytellers have spiced up the story with details. John may have generously omitted an initial misunderstanding.<sup>85</sup></p>	
<p>6. <i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> John Hogg offered to tell them a story. Much of the night was spent singing and telling stories. Mr Shenoodah told a Bible story.</p>	<p><i>The elder:</i> He noted that he had a greater treasure to offer. He pulled out a small book and told them its stories all night.</p>
<p><i>Similarities:</i> Much of the night was spent telling stories, including by John Hogg and including at least one Bible story (and, given</p>	

83. She notes (*Master-Builder*, p. 217) that robbers were pervasive in the area, and Hanna's inference that they were robbers also reflects the datum that one man nearly shot them.

84. Armed farmers guarding against armed bandits may have themselves harmed those they deemed potential enemies. John Hogg may have reported the group's involvement more courteously and generously, especially if he expected any continuing relationship with these men.

85. Especially if, as noted above, he expected any continuing relationship with these men.

<p>John's usual behavior, probably more).</p> <p><i>Differences:</i> The elder omits Mr Shenoodch's role and transforms much of the night into all night. The other account omits the great treasure and the small book.</p> <p><i>Possible explanations for differences:</i> The elder spotlights John Hogg; the hyperbole of 'all night' was common enough that it could stem even from the first telling. The treasure or book details could be embellishments or could be features omitted in Rena's source but recounted by Mr Shenoodch.</p>			
7.	<table border="1"> <tr> <td> <p><i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> Mr Shenoodch's Bible story about judgment elicited a confession from one that he had nearly shot Mr Shenoodch.</p> </td> <td> <p><i>The elder:</i> By morning the band recognized their ways to be wrong, and agreed to turn from robbery.</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p><i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> Mr Shenoodch's Bible story about judgment elicited a confession from one that he had nearly shot Mr Shenoodch.</p>	<p><i>The elder:</i> By morning the band recognized their ways to be wrong, and agreed to turn from robbery.</p>
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<p><i>Similarities:</i> The Bible story(ies) produced an effect and a confession.</p> <p><i>Differences:</i> The 'robber' version has the robbers resolve not to rob further, whereas in the other version they are not robbers.</p> <p><i>Possible explanations for differences:</i> Evangelicals John and Hanna's storytelling presumably had hortatory intent and possibly some response, though it was not highway robbers turning from marauding.</p>			
8.	<table border="1"> <tr> <td> <p><i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> They parted on friendly terms in the morning, and a member of the group helped them on their way.</p> </td> <td> <p><i>The elder:</i> By morning the band recognized their ways to be wrong, and agreed to turn from robbery. They tried to return John's watch and money; he accepted the watch.</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p><i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> They parted on friendly terms in the morning, and a member of the group helped them on their way.</p>	<p><i>The elder:</i> By morning the band recognized their ways to be wrong, and agreed to turn from robbery. They tried to return John's watch and money; he accepted the watch.</p>
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<p><i>Similarities:</i> They parted on friendly terms in the morning.</p> <p><i>Differences:</i> In the more dramatic version, they turn from robbery.</p> <p><i>Possible explanations for differences:</i> Storytellers have spiced up the story. Some inferred conversion from their receptivity and friendly treatment. Perhaps some were later converted, and the tellers of the robber version naturally inferred that they stopped robbing.</p>			
9.	<table border="1"> <tr> <td> <p><i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> John gave the group member a tip so generous that the man went away happily blessing them.</p> </td> <td> <p><i>The elder:</i> John had them keep the money, and he supported them until they could find legal work.</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p><i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> John gave the group member a tip so generous that the man went away happily blessing them.</p>	<p><i>The elder:</i> John had them keep the money, and he supported them until they could find legal work.</p>
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<p><i>Similarities:</i> John gave a member of the group some money.</p> <p><i>Differences:</i> Only in the robber version was money originally taken; long-term provision also appears only in that version (which includes their conversion).</p> <p><i>Possible explanations for differences:</i> Hearing the robber version, one would infer that converted robbers would return the money. John (like many other missionaries of his era) was known for supporting workers,<sup>86</sup> though he would not likely have funded people this lightly.<sup>87</sup></p>			
10.	<table border="1"> <tr> <td> <p><i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> They parted on friendly terms, but the group was not converted.</p> </td> <td> <p><i>The elder:</i> The band (consisting of both Copts and Muslims, according to Rena's elder,<sup>88</sup> but not specified by Bailey)<sup>89</sup> was converted (so Rena's elder, but not, apparently, Bailey's informants).</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p><i>Hogg and Hanna:</i> They parted on friendly terms, but the group was not converted.</p>	<p><i>The elder:</i> The band (consisting of both Copts and Muslims, according to Rena's elder,<sup>88</sup> but not specified by Bailey)<sup>89</sup> was converted (so Rena's elder, but not, apparently, Bailey's informants).</p>
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<p><i>Similarities:</i> They parted on friendly terms.</p> <p><i>Differences:</i> The group was converted only in the elder's retelling for Rena.</p> <p><i>Possible explanations for differences:</i> The elder might conflate different stories. He might embellish the account to impress John's daughter.<sup>90</sup> John probably did revisit this area later, and some of these acquaintances may have later been converted.</p>			

86. E.g. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 143.

87. Rena (*Master-Builder*, p. 13) describes the fiction as 'indiscriminate generosity', and John clearly had to do with far less funds than needed even for potential students and his own needs (e.g. pp. 120-21, 187-96, 203, 249; cf. indigenous self-support on p. 111).

88. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 215. On p. 13 they are 'Mohammedan robbers', but it is unclear whether this represents a more exaggerated version or that they are simply the emphasis because more unusual. Some 'Mohammedans' were converted, though relatively few (twenty-six) until the 1880s (p. 250).

89. This could be because Bailey's informants lacked the information; it could also be because Protestants converting Copts appealed less to Bailey than to John Hogg, or because specifying Muslim conversion explicitly would prove unnecessarily disruptive.

90. 'Performances' for outside interviewers or authoritative figures will vary from performances within the cultural tradition; see Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, p. 111 (cf. 108).

*Evaluating the Differences*

Oral transmission helps explain some of the story's transformation. As Eric Eve notes, John's version is 'too long, too complicated and ultimately too inconsequential ... whereas the form heard by Rena Hogg and Kenneth Bailey is short, pointed and memorable'.<sup>91</sup> The central difference that affects every other element is whether the farmers (specified in Rena's report of John's account as 'melon-growers') were robbers. Oral tradition may have simplified the story by conflating 'a series of encounters with (possibly threatening) persons' with the group with whom they spent the night.<sup>92</sup> Oral traditions could also exaggerate dangers and heroism in successive tellings.<sup>93</sup> Yet such differences need not be attributed to the frailties of later tradition, since one of the firsthand reporters, Hanna, regarded them as robbers.

The other key difference, the conversion of the band, does not actually appear in Bailey's account, or presumably that of the oral tradition on which he draws. It may thus have been the village elder's embellishment or conflation. Nevertheless, the bulk of collective tradition prevented its preservation. Less likely, it may have reflected subsequent (though not immediate)<sup>94</sup> integration of some of these men into Hogg's circle of churches, information not present in the first reports (a letter and a sermon about the particular incident) simply because it reflects a subsequent development. If John later ever revisited his host in that area—Rena's account specifies the particular village—he may well have visited these other men also, following up on the relationship that had been established.

*Divergence in the First Tellings*

The most fundamental issue here is not oral tradition but the firsthand witnesses' differing interpretations. In this case, it appears that the oral tradition was preserved mostly from at least as early as Rena's hearing

91. Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, p. 73.

92. Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, p. 72.

93. Cf. the medieval epic, *The Song of Roland*, as treated in Barber and Barber, *Severed Earth*, p. 90. Social memory tends to increasingly simplify and highlight the hero's virtues and, still more so, the villains' (here perhaps, the robbers') vices (Rafael Rodríguez, *Structuring Early Christian Memory: Jesus in Tradition, Performance, and Text* [LNTS, 407; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2010], p. 76).

94. Rena (*Master-Builder*, p. 13) complains about the idea that they could have been converted and made honest overnight.

in 1910 to at least as late as the period of 1955–65, that is, more than forty or fifty years.

The major differences come not from lapsed memory and legend in subsequent decades but in the very earliest period of recounting the story, before 1910. In fact, some of the differences probably come from the tale's first, enthusiastic public telling: 'The only real sequel to the story', Rena notes, 'was that Mr Shenodeh wove it into an ingenious and thrilling sermon, which greatly moved his audience when it was preached in Assiut a few days later'.<sup>95</sup>

Rena herself does not discount stories simply because they are exciting,<sup>96</sup> and she generally trusts Hanna's memory<sup>97</sup> and preaching.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, she recognizes that even in desperate times, sometimes John's letters omit or play down the difficulties.<sup>99</sup> She also recognizes that dangers (besides robbers) and her father's charm, as was reported in the story, did regularly characterize his ministry.<sup>100</sup>

Why then does Rena prefer John's account to Hanna's, when apparently neither John nor Hanna persuaded the other to change their opinion of the situation? Although John had lived there longer (Hanna was younger), Hanna may have understood the local culture more fully because it was his own culture of origin. Granted, John kept extensive correspondence,<sup>101</sup> and presumably included the incident in a letter.<sup>102</sup> At the same time, Hanna wrote the sermon the morning after the

95. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 218. Cf. Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, p. 73, who allows that even Hanna's story as a whole might be closer to the 1910 version than to John Hogg's version, while acknowledging this surmise as 'speculative'.

96. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, pp. 63, 67. She frankly reports life-threatening danger at times (pp. 126-27, 247).

97. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 129; cf. her respect for him on p. 187.

98. Note her inclusion of John's praise of Hanna in Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 146.

99. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 229.

100. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 218.

101. E.g. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, pp. 132, 158, 188-90, 205-206, 262-63, 265, also noting more than 1100 pages in one year (p. 114). He kept copies of all the letters sent, twenty folios worth (p. 250). It is no surprise that it took Rena two years to research and finish the book (p. 7). In 1863, John also wrote memoirs about his earlier past (pp. 17, 103), although Rena locates this incident in June of 1874 (pp. 213, 215).

102. She attributes his version to 'his own account' (Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 214).

adventure, when it may have been even fresher in memory.<sup>103</sup> The difference in the interpretations of the event on this point is not one of subsequent oral tradition, but at the very level of a shared experience understood by the participants in different ways.<sup>104</sup>

*A 'Bogus Story'?*

Weeden infers that Bailey's version of the story 'is in actuality a bogus story'.<sup>105</sup> This is not what Rena Hogg's evidence shows. Rather, she uses the difference in accounts 'to show how fact and fancy mingle' when speaking of her father.<sup>106</sup> Shared elements suggest what she would consider facts. She denies that the men were robbers but attributes this belief to a misunderstanding of Hanna. She calls the story a 'romantic tale',<sup>107</sup> but does not designate 'tales' as inherently false.<sup>108</sup> 'Romantic' elements may include hagiographic explanatory elements such as her father's bravery in going out at night.<sup>109</sup>

One can speak of a common core between the stories.<sup>110</sup> In many other stories with common cores, however, the common elements yield a common gist, something more debatable in this case (unless one defines 'gist' quite generously). In this instance, the apparent misidentification of the men as robbers does affect the gist of the story, and this misidentification therefore raises the question of whether this was an ideal example for Bailey to use. This may be one reason that his later *Expository Times* article does not use it (though he may well simply be abbreviating), and his *Themelios* redaction of his early article is less emphatic about the analogies.

103. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 218.

104. Cf. John A. Robinson, 'Perspective, Meaning, and Remembering', in David C. Rubin (ed.), *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 199-217 (199): 'Events can be experienced in qualitatively different ways.'

105. Weeden, 'Theory', p. 18. He speaks here of 'the robbers' as belonging to 'later versions', but again, Rena's account shows that they go back to Shenoodeh Hanna.

106. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 214.

107. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 215.

108. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, pp. 118, 119, 259.

109. The oral account on p. 215 seems to suggest bravery; her own account suggests diligence and/or impatience (p. 216).

110. So also Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, p. 72.



The conflict reminds us that misinformation can arise early in the process of reporting an event. It does not, however, undermine the illustration that many substantial points of contact remained for many decades in the retelling of the story—in this case probably even beyond living memory of the incident.

Rena Hogg, who had some familiarity with the local culture, would not reject this central point that Bailey's illustration was intended to emphasize. She did not by any means reject all possibility of exceptional Middle Eastern memory. Concerning the role of memorization in local education, she opined that only the minority Protestant schools 'trained thought as well as memory',<sup>111</sup> but this observation offers a backhanded acknowledgment of the role of memorization in local education.

She also thought that tradition did capture many characteristic traits of her father, though omitting his weaknesses. In a context where Rena mentions exaggerated memories, she also notes that people remembered John's sermons, love of song, 'physical endurance ... his very gestures (as Egyptian as his accent) and the Eastern modes of thought that made his words win home'.<sup>112</sup> In these cases, she thinks of more accurate memories, for she claims that he unconsciously imitated the local people, not merely speaking with Arabic accent and gestures but 'when mingling with the people he became so thoroughly

111. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 156. Local memory practices included reciting the Qur'an or Coptic ritual (p. 156). Such recitation differs, of course, from memory of community stories, since the former is closer to verbatim memory and the latter to gist memory (note the studies in McIver, *Memory*, pp. 61-62), as Bailey, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 364, also suggests. With reference to texts, Bailey, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 364, notes the traditional expectation for a *shaykh* to 'memorize the entire Qur'an' and for Eastern Orthodox clergy to recite hours of liturgy representing 'hundreds of pages'. For Qur'an memorization, see also Small, *Wax Tablets*, p. 287 n. 76; cf. Dale F. Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 41, 50, 63-65, 70 (171); Daniel A. Wagner, *Literacy, Culture and Development: Becoming Literate in Morocco* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 47, 269 (48); Sami Zubaida, *Law and Power in the Islamic World* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 27-28; Samia Touati, *Literacy, Information, and Development in Morocco During the 1990s* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2012), p. 12.

112. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, pp. 13-14.

Egyptian’.<sup>113</sup> Public memory ‘cannot preserve in perfect balance the varying features of any human life’ (and thus it neglected John’s weaknesses), but ‘its choice of emphasis in the present case has been just’.<sup>114</sup> The laudatory side of John’s character—hard-working, contextually relevant and so forth—remained in common memory.

*Weeden’s Treatment of Bailey’s Examples Unrelated to Hogg*

Some of Weeden’s criticisms are to the point, but others reflect an unhelpful bias. Bailey sometimes demonstrably errs, for example regarding his explanation for *samar* from a Hebrew cognate; this alleged cognate is not, however, a necessary foundation for Bailey’s argument. More often, Bailey offers illustrations or case studies—‘anecdotes’, as Weeden calls them—that fall short of the level of observation available in a controlled study.<sup>115</sup>

*Does Ethnography Belong in a Laboratory?*

Pressing for scientific precision, Weeden deconstructs Bailey’s argument with a vigor that few arguments in the humanities could survive. ‘Ultimately’, Weeden contends,

to make a case for the historic exercise of informal controlled oral tradition in Middle Eastern villages, one would have to set up a number of controlled studies by trained cultural anthropologists, applying rigorous social-scientific methodology, to test whether informal controlled oral tradition is and has been historically exercised in such villages as a *modus operandi* to preserve faithfully the integrity of oral tradition.<sup>116</sup>

113. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 213. Physical endurance is referenced *passim*; on John’s love of song, see pp. 38, 100, 149-53, 267.

114. Hogg, *Master-Builder*, p. 213. Sometimes the praised strength was also the weakness: a colleague ‘termed Mr. Hogg’s greatest defect as a worker—his inability to rest’ (p. 136; perhaps including immediately after Rena’s birth, p. 138; cf. p. 58). Middle Eastern hospitality, however, might have judged negatively his preference for study and work to entertaining requests (pp. 114-15). In any case, Rena was correct to anticipate oral tradition’s process of idealization by focus on expected positive traits (see Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, p. 106).

115. Weeden, ‘Theory’, p. 37. Cf. also Dunn, ‘Theory’, p. 61.

116. Weeden, ‘Theory’, p. 37.

Given the impossibility of controlled studies for the past and the rapid loss of younger generations' interest in old tradition in villages due to rapid modernization, Weeden's standard may render Bailey's model completely unverifiable.<sup>117</sup> Controlled studies today are becoming increasingly difficult, as modernization has already in this past generation begun supplanting centuries of traditional culture.<sup>118</sup> Again, as Bailey notes, 'The tradition will last in those villages as long as the community he founded survives or until they acquire electricity and television.'<sup>119</sup>

This criticism is less devastating, however, than Weeden seems to suppose; even anthropologists' participant observations could always be dismissed as anecdotal until compared with other sets of observations. Granted, we cannot be sure that Bailey kept careful notes as an anthropologist might, and thus we might question the precision of Bailey's memory regarding details. His general impressions, however, remain valuable; Bailey's decades immersed in the culture and language—at least traditional Middle Eastern Christian culture (Coptic, and others)—far exceeds the duration of the average anthropologist's field studies immersed in local cultures—often just one to two years.

Weeden contends that since experts in oral tradition are known for ad-libbing, we cannot be certain that the standard history does not include fictitious elements.<sup>120</sup> This objection does not carry one very far, however. In contrast, Bailey's mention of ad-libbing refers to popular village poets, not to stories about community founders or history.<sup>121</sup> Apart from that observation, we may grant that fictitious elements may be added to the tradition over time, and we would expect

117. So also Dunn, 'Theory', p. 62.

118. Oral traditions cannot survive unless they are passed along to the younger generation; see Rubin, *Memory*, p. 136.

119. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*Them*), p. 9; cf. Dunn, 'Theory', pp. 46, 62; McIver, *Memory*, p. 121. Cf. Anna D. Gulick, *Windows on a Different World* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2014), pp. 4-25, esp. pp. 6-8. For passing on family tales in the modern Mediterranean world, see e.g. Julia Pizzuto-Pomaco, *From Shame to Honour: Mediterranean Women in Romans 16* (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2003), pp. 38, 42; *idem*, *From Shame to Honour: Mediterranean Women in Romans 16* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2017), p. 35.

120. Weeden, 'Theory', p. 22.

121. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*Them*), p. 7; *idem*, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 365. Tradents are often cautious about accuracy when they believe that they are recounting a true story (Rubin, *Memory*, p. 141).

more of these in traditions that had been transmitted for longer periods of time.<sup>122</sup> But the particular sort of ad-libbing to which Bailey refers is what is elsewhere called ‘performance variation’, and does not itself change how others (or even necessarily the performer) will tell the basic story line.<sup>123</sup> The story line has been preserved by multiple tradents, and even the tradents who ad lib do not usually intend to change the substance of the story for all future retellings, especially if it is a story dear to the community’s identity.<sup>124</sup>

### *Changing a Parable’s Punch Line*

Weeden protests that Bailey undermines his own case by telling of how an authoritative figure could transform a tradition, such as a parable’s punch line.<sup>125</sup> The account to which he refers in Bailey, however, is specifically prefaced with the observation that he is now turning to how new material enters tradition.<sup>126</sup> Here Bailey recounts being present when, in Lebanon, the changed version was first told, and he notes that virtually everyone present was already aware of the previous standard version. Because the reviser, Rev. Ibrahim Dagher, was a community leader and because the occasion was a dramatic one, the revised version was retold, apparently along with its new context, elsewhere in

122. Weeden, ‘Theory’, p. 34, appeals to oral historiography to show that information considered irrelevant to the community is lost over time. This observation is certainly correct (cf. McIver, *Memory*, p. 91, on selective ‘structural amnesia’; also p. 106), but, given the application of the entire discussion to the Gospels, it sidesteps the observation that fictionalizing within living memory is far more limited.

123. Bailey does not expect poetry to change at all over the long term (‘Tradition’ [*Them*], p. 7; *idem*, ‘Tradition’ [*AsJT*], p. 42), though this verdict may be too optimistic.

124. Dunn, *New Perspective*, pp. 112 (with 110), 118, 122; *idem*, ‘Theory’, p. 54. Bailey, in ‘Tradition’ (*Them*), p. 8; *idem*, ‘Tradition’ (*AsJT*), p. 45; *idem*, ‘Tradition’ (*ExpT*), p. 365, addresses the preservation of ancient historical narratives important to local villages.

125. Weeden, ‘Theory’, pp. 27-28. Memory studies suggest that material such as parables is transmitted according to stable gist rather than verbatim; see McIver, *Memory*, pp. 171-76, though emphasizing the intelligibility of the punch line (p. 174).

126. Bailey, ‘Tradition’ (*Them*), p. 9.

the Middle East.<sup>127</sup> For this reason Bailey heard the same version, this time nearly seventeen years later, from someone else who had heard the story secondhand in Jordan.<sup>128</sup>

Communal memory did not, however, forget that the story originally went a slightly different way; rather, it remembered how this prominent figure had changed it. (The transformed story line also involved not a historical anecdote about the community but a humorous illustration.) Bailey's point is that the change was obvious and meaningful precisely because almost everyone already knew the previous and therefore anticipated story line—his point is that the story was widely known.<sup>129</sup>

By illustrating that everyone in the culture already knew the original story, Bailey emphasizes the vast and rapid reach of what others call collective memory.<sup>130</sup> One of his points about communal memory is that it is public, hence not subject to an individual's manipulation or fabrication the way a merely individual report could be.<sup>131</sup> Most experts on the subject do recognize that collective memory, once *established*, typically *constrains* the core of traditions relevant for community identity.<sup>132</sup> It can be tested against prevalent and prior community knowledge, in a manner similar to Luke's claim in Lk. 1.4.

Bailey's example also highlights the role that particularly prominent figures play in Middle Eastern tradition. Elsewhere he notes that in a twentieth-century Middle Eastern community 'the ranking patriarch was given the honour of telling the story to the newcomer' (i.e. to

127. Dunn, 'Theory', p. 56, reads Bailey in the same way. As Dunn also notes, it was the modification of the parable, rather than its previously standard form, that was 'an event in the history of the Christian community'.

128. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*Them*), p. 9; *idem*, 'Tradition' (*AsJT*), p. 48.

129. For communication typically taking for granted shared assumptions, see e.g. D. Sperber and D. Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); *idem*, 'Representation and Relevance', in R.M. Kempson (ed.), *Mental Representations: The Interface between Language and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 133-53.

130. On collective memory, see McIver, *Memory*, pp. 81-121 and esp. p. 184.

131. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 365.

132. See e.g. Rodríguez, *Structuring*, p. 87; Assmann, *Memory and Civilization*, p. 81; Rubin, *Memory*, p. 136; even in folk tales, cf. Schwartz, 'Smoke', pp. 13-14. For the widespread knowledge of extensive tradition in some oral societies, see e.g. the Dulong, in Tetsunao Yamamori and Kim-kwong Chan, *Witnesses to Power: Stories of God's Quiet Work in a Changing China* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2000), p. 22.

Bailey).<sup>133</sup> This observation is consistent with Bailey's other illustrations where a prominent person is present,<sup>134</sup> as well as in other societies valuing group tradition.<sup>135</sup>

In Middle Eastern and rural Mediterranean culture, deference to authority and tradition suggest that Jesus' designated apostles, leaders of the Christian community in Jerusalem (cf. Gal. 1.18-19; 2.7-9), would in fact be treated as leading authorities on what Jesus said and did. Theirs would be the standard version to which other members of their movement would wish to conform. This would be less true in many of the northern Mediterranean urban centers where Paul ministered, though even there he seems to have made his congregations aware of Cephas, the Twelve, other apostles and the Lord's brothers (1 Cor. 1.12; 3.22; 9.5; 15.5-7; Gal. 1.18-19; 2.7-9; cf. Rom. 15.26-27).

*Weeden vs. Bailey regarding the Haflat Samar*

Weeden helpfully and correctly challenges Bailey's narrower application of the conventional sense of *haflat samar* in the wider Arab context,<sup>136</sup> but Bailey's case for the value of community tradition does not rest primarily on this meaning.<sup>137</sup> Bailey's larger interest is not so much the term's definition as the widespread character of long-standing village traditions in a Middle Eastern setting.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, even

133. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*Them*), p. 7; *idem*, 'Tradition' (*AsJT*), p. 43.

134. E.g. *idem*, 'Tradition' (*Them*), p. 6, noting both formal settings (such as those with teachers and disciples) and the informal settings on which he focuses; *idem*, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 364.

135. On such social control of information, see Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, pp. 96-97; Assmann, *Memory and Civilization*, p. 39. See here esp. Schwartz, 'Smoke', p. 17, citing Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1955); for Brahmans alone reciting the Vedas, see Finnegan, *Oral Poetry*, p. 234. Regarding antiquity, cf. Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, p. 176.

136. Correctly, Weeden, 'Theory', pp. 38-41; cf. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*Them*), p. 6; *idem*, 'Tradition' (*AsJT*), p. 40. *Idem*, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 367, does overemphasize the *hafalât samar*.

137. As noted also by Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, p. 80. For example, Bailey, 'Tradition' (*Them*), p. 6, devotes only a single paragraph to it. Though he mentions such gatherings again (pp. 7, 8, 9), they are simply the major venue for, not the sole expression of, community tradition that he encounters, and his case does not rest on the meaning of the term.

138. As Bailey's illustrations show; e.g. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*Them*), p. 10.

Weeden's discussion of *haflat samar* notes that old traditions are often passed on in this setting, though he objects that preservation is not its purpose and the traditions need not be historical.<sup>139</sup>

Weeden is not impressed that Bailey's Middle Eastern students could explain to him 'the acceptable boundaries for a given story', since Weeden does not regard that activity as fulfilling Bailey's ideal of the *haflat samar*.<sup>140</sup> Bailey's primary point, however, is not that the students became a *haflat samar* so much as that there was a wide cultural understanding of the level of flexibility permitted when transmitting a particular kind of account. Such a point should not be controversial: it is implicit in cultural understandings of the range of particular genres.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, Bailey emphasizes the widespread character of tradition, with this standard usage fixing its core; he 'often' told such stories and students from all over the Middle East already knew them.<sup>142</sup>

Here Weeden complains that one of Bailey's key examples for communal memory is 'a worship service and not a *haflat samar*'.<sup>143</sup> The worship service, however, might be much closer to the conditions

139. Dunn, 'Theory', p. 49. Dunn also points out (pp. 48-50) that Bailey's reference may be to the Coptic subculture with which he had the greatest experience. Perhaps even the etymology was already a belief among his informants. Bailey also notes that stories are told 'both to instruct and to entertain' (Bailey, 'Tradition' [*AsJT*], p. 41); *idem*, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 364, notes the 'party' and 'entertainment' element of the *haflat samar*. In general, oral traditions seem entertaining to modern literate observers, although they were not always originally designed to be thus (Rubin, *Memory*, p. 8).

140. Weeden, 'Theory', p. 24. Although Weeden complains that Bailey depended on students rather than more prominent informants in this case, Bailey's successful appeal even to students might be in some ways more impressive. That even students, with less years of experience, knew the story and knew the boundaries for storytelling (Bailey, 'Tradition' [*AsJT*], pp. 43-44) illustrates how recently and pervasively these skills persisted.

141. Cf. Philip L. Shuler, *A Genre for the Gospels: The Biographical Character of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 25-28; E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 68-126. In antiquity, see e.g. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Dem.* 45-46; Theon, *Progymn.* 2.5-33 (Butts); Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.36; Maximus of Tyre, *Or.* 26.4; 38.4.

142. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 366.

143. Weeden, 'Theory', p. 25; cf. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*AsJT*), pp. 49-50. Among Middle Eastern Christians, *idem*, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 364, regards informal gatherings of believers as *hafalât samar*.

of the earliest Christians than a *haflat samar* would be. When Bailey reports that the church members rehearsed the material so they could share it with their neighbors, Weeden asks whether Bailey witnessed the stories being told to their neighbors to ensure that the stories were correctly retold.<sup>144</sup>

Weeden asks for the standards of controlled studies in the hard sciences; without dispute, such standards would be ideal. Yet we rarely, if ever, can use such standards in our own study of practices in the New Testament world; indeed, Weeden's own earlier study of traditions in Mark's Gospel appears rife with speculation less grounded than Bailey's assumption here. What Bailey's information does attest is the value placed on accurate memory of matters important to the community. His example remains anecdotal, in that one church cannot speak for Middle Eastern culture as a whole; nevertheless, it remains consistent with other evidence on the value of tradition in traditional Middle Eastern culture.

#### *Misrepresenting Bailey*

Sometimes the argument Weeden undermines is not merely peripheral to Bailey's thesis, but a straw man construal of the argument. Weeden finds Bailey's argument easy to refute because he has exaggerated what Bailey claims: 'I [Weeden] understand the *sine qua non* methodological canon of his [Bailey's] theory' to include 'no corruption of the oral tradition'.<sup>145</sup> This is beyond what Bailey actually claims. More accurately, the examples that Weeden cites show that Bailey's argument as a whole qualifies any claims that could be understood as requiring perfect verbatim preservation: Bailey argues for community transmission of the core of particular kinds of material, not that no corruption may occur.

Noting flexibility in the Gospels, Bailey in fact specifically *distinguishes* his model from complete memorization.<sup>146</sup> He plainly differentiates his model from other existing forms of traditional Middle Eastern communication, such as 'formal controlled oral traditions' (including memorization) and uncontrolled gossip.<sup>147</sup> Bailey allows that even stories about community founders may be varied in some

144. Weeden, 'Theory', p. 26.

145. Weeden, 'Theory', p. 52.

146. E.g. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 364.

147. *Idem*, 'Tradition' (*Them*), pp. 5-6.



details and dialogue so long as the story line remains intact.<sup>148</sup> Even if he has sometimes placed anecdotes in the wrong categories, he has described a range of categories. Ignoring Bailey's categories, Weeden treats Bailey's approach as closer to the formal controlled traditions of which Bailey is explicitly *not* speaking.

Bailey expressly articulates his position regarding the gospel tradition not as that of Scandinavian scholars Birger Gerhardsson or Harald Riesenfeld but as that of British scholars C.H. Dodd and W.D. Davies.<sup>149</sup> Bailey is explicit about this difference, something other readers generally recognize.<sup>150</sup> Bailey's model cannot, however, easily appeal to those who still follow Bultmann's default approach of mistrusting traditions until other evidence supplementing their claims appears.<sup>151</sup>

Most of those who use Bailey's information are not tradition-inerrantists. Rather, their normal argument is simply that communities preserve the core of their key traditions,<sup>152</sup> and normally these scholars apply this claim only to the period within living memory between Jesus' ministry and the writing of the Synoptic Gospels (and sometimes John).

148. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*Them*), p. 7.

149. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*Them*), p. 5; *idem*, 'Tradition' (*AsJT*), pp. 36-37; *idem*, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), pp. 353-54. However, here Bailey himself may too-readily embrace the common caricature of Gerhardsson (cf. James D.G. Dunn, 'Eyewitnesses and the Oral Jesus Tradition', *JSHJ* 6 [2008], pp. 85-105 [89]; Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher*, p. 337). For Dodd, see also McIver, *Memory*, p. 181, quoting from C.H. Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity* (London: Collins, 1971), p. 33.

150. E.g. Mournet, *Tradition*, pp. 90-91.

151. Bailey, 'Tradition' (*Them*), p. 5. Dodd stands close to the dominant British (as opposed to German, esp. Bultmannian) form-critical consensus of his day. Even among German scholars, however, critics such as Jeremias (sometimes unfairly omitted in summaries of the second quest; see C.J. den Heyer, *Jesus Matters: 150 Years of Research* [Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997], pp. 63-66) proved far more conservative than Bultmann.

152. E.g. Dunn, 'Eyewitnesses and Tradition', p. 99, who affirms the substance while disavowing the sequence, precision and 'rote-like' transmission. On the preference instead for seeing both sides as bearing the burden of proof, see Dagmar Winter, 'The Burden of Proof in Jesus Research', in Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus. I. How to Study the Historical Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 843-51.

Weeden uses Bailey's examples to deconstruct Bailey in roughly the same way that Weeden decades earlier deconstructed Mark's Gospel, although it plainly stems from a period of living memory of Jesus' works. Weeden finds 'traditions in conflict' in Mark's Gospel, polarizing into conflict features that other interpreters typically treat as complementary.<sup>153</sup> He understands Mark as reacting against the sort of *theios-anēr* Christology he finds reflected in 2 Corinthians, and represented in Mark's narrative by the disciples, who consistently reject Jesus' suffering Son-of-Man Christology.<sup>154</sup> Weeden contends that Mark polemicizes against what the disciples represent,<sup>155</sup> and that Mark reinterprets and takes over his opponents' title for Jesus, 'Son of God'.<sup>156</sup>

Even before more recent narrative-critical developments, most scholars rejected Weeden's understanding of Mark.<sup>157</sup> Scholars have widely challenged the presence of a *theios-anēr* Christology in this period.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, while New Testament scholars have a history of

153. Weeden, *Traditions*. This is Weeden's one major academic theological work; he also authored *The Two Jesuses* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003), although this has generated far less attention than his earlier monograph.

154. See Weeden, *Traditions*, pp. 52-69; cf. pp. 77-80, 88, 96, 101, 144, 166-67; *idem*, 'The Cross as Power in Weakness (Mark 15:20b-41)', in Werner H. Kelber (ed.), *The Passion in Mark: Studies in Mark 14-16* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 115-34 (118-19, 128-29). That Mark combats this error is central to Weeden's case in *Traditions*, which reflects his earlier dissertation *The Heresy That Necessitated Mark's Gospel* (PhD Diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1964).

155. Weeden, *Traditions*, pp. 23-26; cf. pp. 26-50.

156. Weeden, *Traditions*, p. 165; cf. *idem*, 'Cross', p. 134.

157. See e.g. Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (trans. Howard Clark Kee; London: SCM Press, 1975), p. 93; Dan O. Via, *Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament: A Structuralist Approach to Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 75; cf. more generically Werner H. Kelber, 'Conclusion: From Passion Narrative to Gospel', in Werner H. Kelber and Samuel Byrskog (eds.), *Jesus in Memory: Traditions in Oral and Scribal Perspectives* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), pp. 153-80 (179).

158. See David Lenz Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (SBLDS, 1; Missoula, MT: SBL Press, 1972); William L. Lane, 'Theios Anēr Christology and the Gospel of Mark', in Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney (eds.), *New Dimensions in New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), pp. 144-61; Carl R. Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism: A Critique of the Use of This Category in New Testament Christology* (SBLDS, 40; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977); Eugene V. Gallagher, *Divine*

attributing tension in a passage to opponents or divergent sources, many people both in antiquity and today manage to hold divergent views in tension.<sup>159</sup>

*Unconcerned with Facts?*

Weeden complains that Bailey's illustration of the community producing a fictitious account of a groom's death shows that memories can be falsified. It is certainly true that memories can be falsified, yet in this case the communal memory is not false, but limited: instead of noting that Hanna<sup>160</sup> shot his friend Butrus by accident, they reported that the gun fired, killing Butrus, while Hanna was holding it.

This illustration does not falsify the information, as Weeden suggests, but frames it so as to limit the sphere of acceptable interpretation and highlight the incident's accidental character. By contrast, the conspicuously absurd version given to the police, which was 'immediately falsified and fictionalized',<sup>161</sup> does not become the final community version.<sup>162</sup> Bailey's point is that the community agrees on a story and sticks with it for as long as that story matters for the community's identity.<sup>163</sup> This observation supports the importance of

*Man or Magician? Celsus and Origen on Jesus* (SBLDS, 64; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982); Barry L. Blackburn, "'Miracle Working ΘΕΙΟΙ ΑΝΔΡΕΣ'" in Hellenism (and Hellenistic Judaism)', in David Wenham and Craig Blomberg (eds.), *The Miracles of Jesus* (Gospel Perspectives, 6; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), pp. 185-218; Aage Pilgaard, 'The Hellenistic *Theios Aner*: A Model for Early Christian Christology?' in Peder Borgen and Søren Giversen (eds.), *The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), pp. 101-22. Weeden provides counter-arguments in *Traditions*, p. vii.

159. See e.g. Christopher Pelling, *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 4, 12-13.

160. This is a different Hanna from Shenodeh Hanna, mentioned above.

161. Weeden, 'Theory', p. 29.

162. Weeden, 'Theory', p. 30, seems to suggest that the falsified version to the police becomes permanent, rather than the redacted community account, but this is not the way that Bailey's account reads. Moreover, the closest likely parallel one could adduce for a community's *protective* falsification in the Gospels, with only a minimum of speculation, would probably be protective anonymity in the Passion narrative (on which, see Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* [trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991], pp. 186-88).

163. See Bailey, 'Tradition' (*Them*), p. 9; *idem*, 'Tradition' (*AsJT*), p. 49; *idem*, 'Tradition' (*ExpT*), p. 366. On traditions becoming fixed, while allowing diversity

collective as well as individual memory, and how aspects of a story could be almost inflexibly transmitted within living memory.

Weeden concludes that the ‘informal controlled tradition’ that Bailey’s anecdotes demonstrate is ‘*not primarily nor particularly* concerned with preserving uncorrupted the archaic, original historical facts’.<sup>164</sup> To this verdict one may offer several replies. First, where Bailey’s examples do not involve historical tradition, historical facts are not at issue; but this differs from the case of the Gospels. Secondly, questions about centuries-long retention (perhaps implied in the reference to ‘archaic ... facts’) are not relevant to the Gospels, which stem from the period of living memory. Thirdly, while original information may not be a tradition’s *only* interest, it does remain a genuine interest in the sort of communities that, within a generation or two, produce biographies of their founder. Such biographies adapt information, but studies regarding those from the Gospels’ milieu show that they remain heavily information-based.<sup>165</sup>

Finally, not all of Bailey’s examples actually are anecdotal, if by this we mean Bailey’s own oral accounts as opposed to other observers’ written sources. Bailey offers both Islamic and Christian examples of Middle Eastern memory practices that are either documented in Middle Eastern sources or have been standard practices easily observable in a Middle Eastern Orthodox seminary.<sup>166</sup> More importantly, he cites significant documentation, from a number of works, for the current circulation of *thousands* of proverbs in Middle Eastern culture.<sup>167</sup> (Memory studies show that proverbs tend to be preserved in memory verbatim rather than according to their gist,<sup>168</sup> though only preserved in

in details for retellings, see also Dunn, ‘Theory’, p. 55. Dunn observes that even in this case Bailey recognized different ways of retelling the story while maintaining the central point and its standardized phrases (Dunn, ‘Theory’, pp. 57-58).

164. Weeden, ‘Theory’, p. 33.

165. See again Keener and Wright, *Biographies of Jesus*.

166. Bailey, ‘Tradition’ (*Them*), pp. 5-6; *idem*, ‘Tradition’ (*AsJT*), p. 39.

167. *Idem*, ‘Tradition’ (*Them*), pp. 6-7; *idem*, ‘Tradition’ (*ExpT*), p. 365; cf. Bailey, ‘Tradition’ (*AsJT*), p. 41.

168. Robert K. McIver and Marie Carroll, ‘Experiments to Develop Criteria for Determining the Existence of Written Sources, and Their Potential Implications for the Synoptic Problem’, *JBL* 121 (2002), pp. 667-87; *idem*, ‘Distinguishing Characteristics of Orally Transmitted Material Compared to Material Transmitted by Literary Means’, *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 18 (2004), pp. 1251-69.

long-term memory through frequent repetition.)<sup>169</sup> These works, cited by Bailey, are neglected by his critics, in contrast to his citation of Rena Hogg's biography of her father. Is this because these works are generally in Arabic, in which Bailey was fluent and his critics are not?

Eric Eve helpfully suggests that Bailey illustrates concretely the sort of 'oral tradition' that Werner Kelber envisions. One need not accept Bailey's theoretical model nor be as conservative as Bailey regarding historical accuracy of the Gospels to recognize that his observations at least bring us much closer to the earliest Christian milieu 'than anything we know in the modern West'.<sup>170</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Some of Weeden's criticisms of Bailey's argument are fair, but others demand a level of precision and documentation that few scholars in the humanities, including Weeden himself, can meet. On the whole, Weeden's nitpicking approach fails to dismantle the heart of Bailey's observations about traditional Middle Eastern memory.

In the end, what is most significant is not that the mode of transmission in nineteenth- or twentieth-century traditional, rural Middle Eastern culture remains the same as it was in the first century. They might be very similar for rural Galilee, but that is not the only context for the gospel tradition. The conditions outside Galilee were probably quite different, since the Christian movement quickly transitioned from being primarily rural Galilean to being predominantly urban and eventually cosmopolitan.<sup>171</sup>

What seems most significant are the following observations, consistent with information attested elsewhere:

169. McIver, *Memory*, pp. 176, 180, following Jacqueline Strunk Sachs, 'Recognition Memory for Syntactic and Semantic Aspects of Connected Discourse', *Perception and Psychophysics* 2 (1967), pp. 437-42; *idem*, 'Memory in Reading and Listening to Discourse', *Memory and Cognition* 2 (1974), pp. 95-100.

170. Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, pp. 83-84. That traditional Middle Eastern memory is stronger for story and sayings recall than modern Western memory is relatively undisputed; cf. also Redman, 'Eyewitnesses', pp. 192-93; Dunn, *Oral Gospel Tradition*, p. 305; *idem*, *New Perspective*, pp. 45-46; Mournet, *Oral Tradition*, p. 190.

171. See Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1979; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 99.

1. Traditional societies typically remember matters of value to their communities.
2. Historical matters can be preserved fairly accurately within living memory, albeit through the grid of the community's interests.
3. Those most versed in such tradition are given the greatest deference in its telling.

Thus, Bailey's work is helpful by illustrating concretely, in a Middle Eastern setting, what we should infer from more general studies of history and oral tradition. Weeden's critique provides a helpful service if used to nuance Bailey's model, but it would be a serious mistake to abandon Bailey's insights altogether. Bailey's experience provides a window into a world presumably much closer to first-century Galilee than the modern Western experiences with memory that many of us might otherwise take for granted.