

Papias and the Gospels

© Richard Bauckham

6 Oct 2012

Introductory note: In *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* I have discussed many aspects of Papias and the Gospels, including detailed study of his comments on Mark and Matthew, the possibility that he knew John's Gospel and a reconstruction of what he said about it.¹ Since I usually prefer not to repeat myself too much, I have decided to do something different in this paper, which will discuss how Papias's own work related to the written Gospels he knew. This is a much debated issue that I was not able to clarify fully in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*. I shall have to repeat some of my argument from chapter 2 of that book, but largely for the sake of developing it further and examining related issues that I did not treat there.

What does the title of Papias' work mean?

Early in the second century² Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, published a work in five books entitled Λογίων Κυριακῶν Ἐξηγήσεις.³ With its five books, it was much the longest work, so far as we know, produced by any Christian author before Irenaeus, with the signal exception of the twenty-four books of *Exegetica* written by the Egyptian 'Gnostic' Basilides, which were probably published a decade or two after Papias's work. Of Basilides' work⁴ we know even less than of Papias's, but that is not saying much. Of Papias's five books all that has survived are a general description of the work by Eusebius, five *verbatim* quotations and a handful of brief references to specific items of content. It is more than likely that other material from Papias has been preserved by ancient writers who do not attribute it to him by name, but we have so little attributed material that the task of identifying unattributed material is almost impossible. It is not surprising that the nature of his work is by no means obvious and is a matter of wide disagreement among scholars.

¹ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) chapters 2, 9, 16.

² A *terminus a quo* is provided by Papias's knowledge of Matthew's Gospel, 1 Peter, 1 John and the Book of Revelation (his knowledge of these books is largely undisputed). The once standard view that his book could not have been completed before the reign of Hadrian was based on a statement of Philip of Side that is now generally agreed to evince a confusion of Papias with what Eusebius says about Quadratus. I do not think we know anything about Papias's work that requires a date later than c. 100. In view of what he says about Aristion and John the Elder, his principal eyewitness sources (see below in this paper), it seems to me that Papias would have had little reason to delay completing and publishing his work once they were dead. So I think a date c. 100-110 is probable.

³ On the precise wording of the title see Armin Daniel Baum, 'Papias als Kommentator Evangelischer Aussprüche Jesu,' *NovT* 38 (1996) 257-275, here 257; Enrico Norelli, *Papia di Hierapolis: Esposizione degli Oracoli del Signore: I Frammenti* (Milan: Figlie di San Paolo, 2005) 59 and n. 2. The genitive ἐξηγήσεως in Eusebius' version of the title (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.1) is no doubt dependent on βιβλία understood, and this reading should be preferred to the variant ἐξηγήσεις in one manuscript.

⁴ The fragments are collected in Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (London: SCM Press, 1987) 417-444.

Broadly there are two possibilities. One is that Papias wrote something like a Gospel, a collection of Jesus traditions, drawn either from written Gospels and oral sources or solely from oral sources. The other is that he wrote a commentary on or interpretation of Jesus traditions. In this latter case there are several debated possibilities as to the way written Gospels and traditions from oral sources were employed in his work. The word Ἐξηγήσις in the title can be translated in such a way as to suit either of these types of literary work, but before discussing that it will be helpful to resolve the meaning of Λογίων Κυριακῶν. Here we can at least compare Papias's own use of the same phrase in his note about Mark's Gospel, which he evidently regarded as a compilation of the κυριακῶν λογίων that had featured in Peter's oral teaching (N 5, H 3).⁵ He also uses the words τὰ λόγια to describe the contents of Matthew's Gospel (his comment on which should probably be translated not 'Matthew composed the *logia*' but 'Matthew made an orderly collection of the [already existing] *logia*'), by which we can assume he means τὰ λόγια κυριακά.

In its pagan, Jewish and Christian usage the word λόγιον, a much more specific word than λόγος, seems always to mean 'oracle,' i.e. an authoritative utterance from a divine source.⁶ Given the Jewish and Christian understanding of sacred scriptures, it could be used to refer to utterances of Scripture, but the word itself does not *per se* require a written rather than an oral form. Papias is the first writer known to have used it of Gospel traditions⁷; later Justin and Irenaeus follow suit (with reference to written Gospels). From Papias's note about Mark's Gospel it is clear that λόγια κυριακά were not necessarily written, since he uses this term for the traditions in Peter's oral teaching, before Mark recorded them. In the same context Papias also describes what Mark recorded as 'the things that were either said or done by the Christ,'⁸ and recent scholars have tended to think that therefore the λόγια κυριακά were not only sayings of Jesus but also stories about Jesus. This interpretation can be sustained by taking κυριακά in an objective rather than a subjective sense: not utterances of Jesus, but utterances about Jesus.⁹ However, in that case it is difficult to give the word λόγια its full weight. Could Papias have regarded stories about Jesus in the oral tradition as authoritative utterances with a divine source? Moreover, when Papias speaks, in the section of his preface that Eusebius first quotes, about how he collected Jesus traditions from oral sources he refers to 'commandments given by the Lord to the faith' (N 5, H 3), which suggests that at least what he most valued were

⁵ I give the numbers of the fragments in Norelli, *Papia*, and Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers* (3rd edition; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 722-767.

⁶ For discussions see Hugh Jackson Lawlor, 'Eusebius on Papias,' *Hermathena* 19/43 (1922) 167-222, here 189-193; Norelli, *Papias*, 59-80.

⁷ Dieter Lührmann, 'Q: Sayings of Jesus or Logia?,' in *The Gospel Behind the Gospels: Current Studies on Q*, ed. Ronald A. Piper (NovTSup 75; Leiden: Brill 1995) 97-116, here 106-112, thinks Papias invented this usage.

⁸ For parallels to this phrase, see Jaap Mansfeld, 'Galen, Papias, and Others on Teaching and Being Taught,' in *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone*, ed. Esther G. Chazon, David Satran and Ruth A. Clements (JSJSup 89; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 317-329, here 327 and n.51.

⁹ Josef Kürzinger, *Papias von Hierapolis und die Evangelien des Neuen Testament* (Eichstätter Materialien 4; Regensburg: Pustet, 1983) 71-75; Ulrich H. J. Körtner, *Papias von Hierapolis* (FRLANT 133; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) 154-156.

sayings of Jesus. Perhaps the key to his usage lies in the fact that most stories about Jesus *contained* sayings of Jesus, and so Papias may have been able loosely to classify most of the contents of Mark's and Matthew's Gospels as λόγια κυριακά. Those to which the title of his own book refers could also be similarly heterogeneous, though his choice of this term indicates that his main interest was in Jesus' sayings.

But was his work a collection of them or an interpretation of them? The English word 'exposition' captures rather well the ambiguity of the word ἐξήγησις, if we remember that it can mean a 'setting forth' as well as an 'explanation' or 'commentary', although the former meaning is rarely encountered in modern English. The word in Papias's title was translated into Latin as *Explanatio* ('explanation, interpretation') both by Rufinus in his translation of Eusebius and by Jerome in his short account of Papias in *De viris illustribus*, but neither of them knew anything more about Papias's work than Eusebius says. Although during Jerome's lifetime it was apparently rumoured that he had translated Papias's work, he made clear that he had no intention of doing so (H 8), and seems never to have looked at it. According to Liddell and Scott, the Greek word means either 'statement, narrative' (corresponding to ἐξηγέομαι in the sense of 'to tell at length, to relate') or 'explanation, interpretation' (corresponding to ἐξηγέομαι in the sense of 'to expound, to interpret'). I think that 'account, report' may be better English terms for the first of these meanings. Until recently almost all scholars have assumed that the word in Papias's title has the second of these meanings (e.g. 'Exposition of the Dominical *Logia*'),¹⁰ but Josef Kürzinger has proposed the second meaning ('Report' or 'Collection of the Dominical *Logia*').¹¹ A few other scholars have agreed.¹²

Ἐξήγησις is not common in the titles of ancient books. In fact, besides Papias's, there seem to be only six known examples,¹³ and only one of these is the title of a book that is still extant. The life of Homer by (Pseudo-)Herodotus carries the title, in some manuscripts: Ἐξήγησις περὶ τῆς τοῦ Ὀμήρου γενέσιος καὶ βιοτῆς¹⁴ ('Account of the Origins and Life of Homer'). The work dates from between 50 and 150 CE,¹⁵ but unfortunately we cannot tell when this particular title was

¹⁰ Recent advocates of this translation include Baum, 'Papias,' 267-269; Norelli, *Papias*, 80-81. Sometimes one still finds the plural: 'Expositions of the Dominical Logia': so Charles E. Hill, 'The Fragments of Papias,' in *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Paul Foster (London: T. & T. Clark [Continuum], 2007) 42-51, here 44.

¹¹ Kürzinger, *Papias*, 75-77: 'Mitteilung von Herrenlogien' and 'Sammlung von Herrenlogien.' Kürzinger combines this view with the view that λόγια κυριακά means 'sayings about the Lord,' which makes it unnecessary to take ἐξήγησις in the sense of 'Erklärung.'

¹² Listed in Baum, 'Papias,' 267.

¹³ This small collection (as well as the collection of titles using the word ἐξηγητικός that follows) is the fruit of my own search. I have not seen all six collected elsewhere. Kürzinger, *Papias*, 76, notes two of them. He also makes this general statement: 'Die griechische Literaturgeschichte zeigt Beispiele, an denen man sieht, dass ἐξήγησις vielfach als Titelwort im Sinn von «Bericht, Mitteilung» u. ä. verwendet wurde, besonders auch bei Sammlungen von alten Überlieferungen (Mythensammlungen u. ä.)' Unfortunately he does not give references or examples.

¹⁴ Thomas W. Allen, *Homeri Opera*, vol. 5 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912) 192.

¹⁵ Martin L. West, *Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer* (LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003) 301.

given to it. It does provide evidence that ἐξήγησις could be used for a work of a biographical nature (in this case a highly fictional one).

Of three other works we know only the titles. To the Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea (5th century BCE) the *Suda* attributes a work called Ἐξήγησις τῶν Ἐμπεδοκλέους ('Interpretation of the works of Empedocles'). It is debated whether the work is correctly ascribed to Zeno, whether it might be a title scribes gave to a section of Zeno's one and only work, or whether (like the work of Heraclides we shall shortly mention) it was a polemical work, in which case the title might mean something like 'Explanation in refutation of the works of Empedocles.'¹⁶ The works of the philosopher Heraclides Ponticus (4th century BCE), listed by Diogenes Laertes (5.88), include Ἡρακλείτου ἐξηγήσεις δ' ('Interpretations of Heraclitus, 4 books') and Πρὸς τὸν Δημόκριτον ἐξηγήσεις α' ('Explanations in reply to Democritus, 1 book'). These, though remote from Papias in both time and subject-matter, are examples of ἐξήγησις used to label works of interpretation of written treatises. But there is a more relevant example. The Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Aristobulus (2nd century BCE) wrote a dialogue between himself and king Ptolemy in which he provided a philosophical exegesis of the law of Moses. Only fragments survive. Ancient writers use more than one title to refer to it: Ἐξηγήσεις τῆς Μωσέως γραφῆς ('Interpretations of the Writing of Moses')¹⁷ and τὰ Ἀριστοβούλου βασιλεῖ Πτολεμαίῳ προσπεφωνημένα ('The Addresses of Aristobulus to King Ptolemy').¹⁸ We should note that, with the exception of Zeno, these titles in which ἐξήγησις means 'interpretation' use the word in the plural (ἐξηγήσεις).

Finally, the grammarian Dositheus of Ascalon is said to have written Ἐξήγησις τοῦ παρ' Ὀμήρῳ κλισίου ('Account [?] of [the word] κλισιον in Homer'), which was presumably a collection of the occurrences of the word κλισιον ('shed') in Homer, but perhaps also a discussion of their meanings.¹⁹ These six titles seem to illustrate the two possible understandings of Ἐξήγησις in Papias's title: 'Account' or 'Interpretation.'

We should note that the adjective ἐξηγητικός was also used in book titles. Evidently the Greek navigator and geographer Timosthenes (3rd century BCE) wrote a book called τὸ ἐξηγητικόν [sc. βιβλίον] (FGH 354), while Anticleides of Athens²⁰ wrote τὰ ἐξηγητικά [sc. βιβλία] (Plutarch, *Nic.* 23.8) or τὸ ἐξηγητικόν (Athenaeus 11.473b-c), which would seem to have been a collection of

¹⁶ Mario Untersteiner, *Zenone: Testimonianzen e Frammenti* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1970) 27-28.

¹⁷ Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, vol. 3: *Aristobulus* (SBLTT 39; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 120 (T8a, T8b).

¹⁸ Holladay, *Fragments*, 124 (T14). Aristobulus's work is also described as βίβλους ἐξηγητικὰς τοῦ Μωυσέως νόμου ('exegetical books on the law of Moses') (Holladay, *Fragments*, 117 [T7]) and τὰς Ἐλεαζάρου καὶ Ἀριστοβούλου διηγήσεις ('the narratives of Eleazar and Aristobulus' - referring to two works by these authors) (Holladay, *Fragments*, 123 [T11]), but these are probably not intended as titles.

¹⁹ Kürzinger, *Papias*, 76.

²⁰ Jacoby, FGH, distinguishes Anticleides of Athens (no. 140) from Autocleides (no. 353), but the latter name seems to be a scribal error for the former.

interpretations of Athenian laws relating to religious ritual.²¹ Athenaeus also ascribes a work of the same title on the same topic to Cleidemus (9.409f-410a), but this is probably an error for Anticleides.

Not long after Papias (whose work I would date c. 100-110), in the reign of Hadrian (117-135) the Egyptian 'Gnostic' Basilides wrote his Ἐξηγητικά [sc. βιβλία] in twenty-four books (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 4.81.1). Quoting a refutation of this work by Agrippa Castor, Eusebius says that these were twenty-four books 'on the Gospel' (εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) (*Hist. Eccl.* 4.7.7), though the only substantial fragment (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 4.81.1-4.83.2) comes, it has been suggested, from a passage of commentary on 1 Peter.²² It was long enough to have been a commentary on a whole collection of scriptures, and we know too little about it to suppose that, as Charles Hill suggests, either Basilides' work was a response to that of Papias or *vice versa*.²³ Clement of Alexandria also refers to a work by Basilides' disciple Isidore entitled τὰ τοῦ προφήτου Παρχῶρ ἐξηγητικά ('exegetical books on the prophet Parchor') (*Strom.* 6.53.2), apparently an interpretation of an otherwise unknown prophetic text.²⁴ Another Christian writer to whom Clement refers, Julius Cassian, wrote a work in several books called τὰ ἐξηγητικά [sc. βιβλία] (*Strom.* 1.101.3).²⁵ In it he discussed the chronology of Moses, dating him before the Greek philosophers, and so the work presumably included interpretation of some part(s) of the Pentateuch. In discussing all these works I have avoided the English word 'commentary' because it may well suggest a text + lemma structure, which we do not know that any of these works had.

As book titles ἐξηγητικόν [sc. βιβλίον] and ἐξηγητικά [sc. βιβλία] are unambiguous. They cannot mean anything other than '[book(s) of] interpretation.' Probably the plural ἐξηγήσεις in a title (of which we have found three examples) is also unambiguous, meaning 'interpretations.' (As the titles of Heraclides' books show, the plural does not indicate that the work consists of more than one book.) It is the singular ἐξήγησις (of which we have found two examples, apart from Papias) that is potentially ambiguous. In one case (Pseudo-Herodotus' life of Homer) it certainly means 'account,' but in the other case (Dositheus' book on κλίσιον in Homer) the meaning is less clear.

We turn now to more general usage of the word ἐξήγησις. Baum²⁶ and Norelli²⁷ both lay considerable weight on Hugh Jackson Lawlor's survey of the use of ἐξήγησις, ἐξηγητής and ἐξήγεῖσθαι in the New Testament, Apostolic Fathers, Justin, Irenaeus, the Gospel of Peter and Josephus (as well one passage in Lucian and one in Epictetus).²⁸ He concluded that

²¹ Officials responsible for such interpretation were called ἐξηγηταί.

²² Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 440-441.

²³ Hill, 'The Fragments,' 48-49.

²⁴ Perhaps Parchor is the disciple of Basilides whom Eusebius calls Bar Coph (*Hist. Eccl.* 4.7.7).

²⁵ For his name, see *Strom.* 3.91.1.

²⁶ Baum, 'Papias,' 268.

²⁷ Norelli, *Papias*, 81.

²⁸ Lawlor, 'Eusebius,' 171-189.

in the period with which we are concerned the dominant sense of ἐξήγεῖσθαι and its derivatives, is that of interpretation or translation. In most instances they are used of the interpretation of the Scriptures, the logia, or dreams. We have noticed ἐξηγητής ten times, always meaning an interpreter; in another instance, perhaps, with a slightly different signification. We have met with ἐξηγησις over thirty times, always bearing the sense indicated, with four exceptions. Twice Justin's first *Apology* is called an ἐξηγησις; once in St. Clement the same word is used in a sense apparently analogous to that of ἐξήγεῖσθαι in John i.18, and once in Josephus for a narrative. These three senses are also exemplified in the use of the verb; and, in addition, it is used by Josephus to indicate the management of affairs by a governor, and by Irenaeus for the exposition of heretical doctrine. The latter writer also takes ἐξήγεῖσθαι in the sense of the interpretation of natural phenomena.²⁹

But we should be cautious about taking these results as conclusive evidence that the word ἐξηγησις in Papias's title must mean 'interpretation.' In the first place, Lawlor's reading of the texts is not always reliable. In Justin, *Dial.* 72.1, ἐξηγήσεις certainly means 'statements,' not 'interpretations,' as Lawlor supposes.³⁰ He unnecessarily mystifies the meaning of 1 Clem 49:2; 50:1, where ἐξήγεῖσθαι means 'to describe' and ἐξηγησις 'description.'

Secondly, the significance of the evidence can be questioned. For example, in the whole of the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers (excluding Papias), there are only two occurrences of ἐξηγησις, one in the sense of 'description' (1 Clem 50:1), the other in the sense of 'interpretation' (of a vision: Hermas, *Vis.* 3.7.4). In the same body of literature, the verb occurs eight times, in seven of which it means 'to relate' or 'to describe' (Luke 24:35; Acts 10:8; 15:12, 14; 21:19; 1 Clem 49:2; Hermas, *Vis.* 4.2.5), while in the remaining instance (John 1:18) most interpreters give it the sense of 'to make known,' not 'to interpret.' The two occurrences of the verb in the Gospel of Peter mean 'to relate.' It is not surprising that in Justin's *Dialogue* ἐξηγησις and ἐξήγεῖσθαι frequently mean 'interpretation' and 'to interpret,' since the subject of the work is the interpretation of Scripture, more specifically of scriptural prophecy. In any case, to suppose that the preponderance of usage, such as it is, in this body of literature can *decide* the meaning in Papias's title is fallacious. Any writer is free to use a word in any of the meanings available within its use in his milieu. Since ἐξηγησις often means interpretation (especially of dreams and Scripture), this might well be the meaning in Papias's title, but since it also has a range of other meanings such as 'account,' 'description,' 'statement' (1 Clem 50:1; Justin, *Dial.* 72.1; *1 Apol.* 61.1; 68.3; Josephus, *BJ* 1.30) some such meaning could be Papias's.

Worth particular attention among the minority of texts in Lawlor's trawl (those where ἐξηγησις does not mean 'interpretation') are three where the word describes the whole literary work in question (just as it does in Papias's title). In Justin, *1 Apol.* 61.1; 68:3, it must mean something like 'account' and refers to Justin's whole apology. But of even more interest is Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.30, at

²⁹ Lawlor, 'Eusebius,' 188.

³⁰ Lawlor, 'Eusebius,' 182.

the conclusion of the preface to the work. In this preface Josephus has given an outline of the history he is going to narrate. He concludes the preface:

Πουήσομαι δὲ ταύτην τῆς ἐξηγήσεως ἀρχήν, ἣν καὶ τῶν κεφαλαίων ἐποιησάμην.

A very literal translation would be:

I will make this beginning of the account, which (beginning) I also made (the beginning) of the summary.

Thackeray (LCL) translates:

I will now open my narrative with the events named at the beginning of the foregoing summary.

Here ἐξήγησις refers to the whole of the narrative of his seven books of history. This historiographical usage corresponds to similar uses of the term for an account of a sequence of events in Thucydides (1.72) and Polybius (6.3.1). Nevertheless I think the translation ‘narrative’ is less justified than the less specific ‘account.’

I find this investigation of the usage of ἐξήγησις inconclusive as to its meaning in Papias’s title. On the one hand, since λόγιον means ‘oracle,’ the kind of utterance that often requires interpretation, ‘Interpretation of the Oracles of the Lord’ seems a very natural and plausible translation. On the other hand, we perhaps need to ask, as supporters of this translation have not, whether one should not, if that were the meaning, expect the plural ἐξηγήσεις. It is significant that Lawlor thought the variant (and almost certainly not preferable) reading ἐξηγήσεις in Eusebius’s report of Papias’s title must be correct: ‘The latter word [ἐξήγησις] would be used of the interpretation of a single passage; the former [ἐξηγήσεις] of interpretations of many passages.’³¹ In that case, perhaps Ἐξήγησις in Papias’s title has the rather colourless meaning ‘account,’ leaving the real emphasis of the title on Λογίων Κυριακῶν.

Considerations of content

If the usage of the word ἐξήγησις does not provide a decisive answer to the kind of work Papias wrote, might what we actually know of its contents help? Only Eusebius gives us anything like a description of it (N 5, H 3), and he says nothing to imply that Papias provided interpretation of the sayings of Jesus or of stories about Jesus. He says that Papias includes traditions he received from Aristion and John the Elder, which, to judge by the quotation from Papias’s preface that Eusebius has provided, would be traditions of sayings of Jesus. He also says that Papias related, from unwritten tradition, ‘certain strange parables of the Saviour and teachings of his and some other statements of a more mythical character.’ Whether the last phrase refers to sayings of Jesus (perhaps the saying of Jesus about the extraordinary fruitfulness of the earth in the time of the kingdom [N 1, H 14] seemed ‘mythical’ to Eusebius) or stories is not clear, but it does not sound

³¹ Lawlor, ‘Eusebius.’ 182, cf. 167. Lawlor made the comment because he supposed, probably incorrectly, that Justin, *Dial.* 72.1, refers to an apocryphal book of Ezra called ἐξηγήσεις εἰς τὸν νόμον περὶ τοῦ πάσχα, which he thought ‘a notable parallel to the title of the work of Papias’ (182).

like interpretation. Again he refers to ‘other accounts of the sayings of the Lord³² belonging to Aristion ... and the traditions of John the Elder.’ Eusebius says that Papias told a story ‘about a woman accused of many sins before the Lord,’ which Eusebius knew in the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* (probably he does not mean that Papias quotes it from that gospel). He also mentions two stories about disciples of Jesus in the period of the early church that Papias had heard from the daughters of Philip. These are scarcely λόγια κυριακά, but nor are they interpretations of λόγια κυριακά, unless Papias told them in the course of interpreting λόγια κυριακά. Of course, Eusebius’ account of Papias’s book is guided by his own interests, but from what he says it sounds very much like a collection of Gospel traditions (with the addition of some stories about the disciples of Jesus after Jesus’ earthly life). Nor does Eusebius say that Papias quoted sayings of Jesus or stories about Jesus from the Gospels, though he quotes what Papias had to say about the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. Perhaps he takes it for granted and thinks only the material that Papias did not have from written Gospels sufficiently unexpected to be worth mentioning. But, again, his description does not sound like the description of a commentary on the Gospels or on material from them.

The impression Eusebius’ account leaves could well be misleading, but there is very little else in our meagre information about the contents of Papias’s work that could serve to correct it. The only two substantial quotations from Papias that we have are the lengthy saying of Jesus about the marvels of the coming kingdom, with the short dialogue with Judas that is attached to it (N 1, H 14), and an account of the death of Judas (N 6, H 18). From Philip of Side we learn that Papias had an account of the raising of the mother of Manaem from the dead (N 10, H 5), presumably by Jesus, and that he said John and James were killed by Jews³³ (N 10, H 5). Of all the information we have about what Papias said, this last item is perhaps the most likely to have been a comment on a saying of Jesus. Papias could well have said this after relating a version of the saying of Jesus in Mark 10:39-40.

Two other possible indications of interpretation of sayings of Jesus in Papias should be mentioned. One is the material Irenaeus quotes from ‘the elders’ that includes interpretation of the parable of the sower (cf. Mark 4:20) and (if this is included in what Irenaeus reports from the elders) a citation of John 14:2 in the same context of interpretation (*Adv. Haer.* 5.36.1-2). Some scholars (I used to be one of them) think that on the four or five occasions when Irenaeus reports traditions from ‘the elders’ he had this material from Papias.³⁴ But careful

³² The phrase is τῶν τοῦ κυρίου λόγων, but it would be a mistake to make anything of the fact that the word is not λόγων, since this is Eusebius’s phrase, not Papias’s.

³³ The reliability of this information has often been doubted, but in its favour is the fact that Philip of Side is specific: he says that Papias said this in the second book of his work. Norelli, *Papias*, 369-379, argues for the authenticity of this attribution to Papias.

³⁴ They are collected in Norelli, *Papias*, 531-536; Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 768-773. In my view, *Adv. Haer.* 2.22.5 does not relay tradition from the elders, but simply reflects Irenaeus’s interpretation of John 21:24.

reading of *Adv. Haer.* 5.33.3-4 (N 1, H 14) shows that Irenaeus had a source other than Papias for the traditions of ‘the elders.’³⁵

Secondly, there are four fragments – brief quotations or statements about what Papias said – which on the face of it seem quite unrelated to Gospel traditions and have sometimes been thought to be from Papias’s interpretations of sayings of Jesus³⁶:

(1) He understood ‘the whole “six days” to refer to Christ and the church’ (N 15, H 12);

(2) A statement about the fallen angels, with allusion to ‘the ancient serpent’ (Rev 12:9) (N 12a, H 11);

(3) He ‘interpreted the sayings about Paradise spiritually, and referred them to the church of Christ’ (N 16, H 13);

(4) He said that ‘they used to call those who practised a godly innocence “children” ‘ (N 13, H 15).

What is actually striking about these is that they all relate to Genesis 1-3. (Norelli has shown convincingly, from patristic parallels, that [4] refers to Adam and Eve.³⁷) This suggests that they are best explained, not piecemeal, but as a group. I propose that Papias began his work with an account of the primeval history, giving it a Christological interpretation. This would be parallel, though evidently in content rather different, to the beginning of the Gospel of John (1:1-5, which reprises Genesis 1:1-5, reading it christologically).³⁸ If this is correct, it does imply that Papias conceived his work as something like a historical narrative of Jesus, which would make an account of the primeval history as a prelude appropriate. Perhaps he also positioned his stories of the disciples in the post-Easter period in a corresponding postlude, which described the universal mission of the church.

Minor confirmations of these suggestions are two of the meagre bits of information we have about which fragments of Papias derive from which of his five books. No (4) above, the probable reference to Adam and Eve, is said to come from book 1 (N 13, H 15). The account of the death of Judas (N 6, H 18) is said to come from book 4, which is plausible if Papias’s work had a narrative sequence and book 5 was devoted to stories about the disciples in mission. However, any such proposals have to be made with appropriate caution, never forgetting how little we actually know about the contents of Papias’s work.

One final possible indication that Papias wrote a work of interpretation of sayings of Jesus is the phrase ταῖς ἐρμηνείαις in the passage Eusebius quotes from his preface. We shall consider this in the next section.

Papias’s self-presentation as a historian in his preface

³⁵ See Norelli, *Papia*, 194-199; Antonio Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo: Commentario al Libro V del “Adversus haereses”* (BAC 33; Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1988) 427-428.

³⁶ See, most recently, Dennis R. MacDonald, *Two Shipwrecked Gospels: The Logoi of Jesus and Papias’s Exposition of the Logia about the Lord* (SBLLECIL 8; Atlanta: SBL, 2012) 18, 22-23, 35-38.

³⁷ Norelli, *Papia*, 414-417.

³⁸ If my view that Papias knew the Gospel of John is correct, then he would probably have been inspired by the example of John’s Prologue, but this is not necessary to the proposal.

David Aune proposed that Papias ‘thought of himself as a historian,’³⁹ and I have developed that suggestion at some length.⁴⁰ More precisely, I have argued that in the portion of his preface that Eusebius quotes, Papias presents the way in which he researched and compiled his work on the model of historiographical practice in the tradition of Thucydides and Polybius (a model to which his near contemporary Josephus also aspired in presenting his history of the Jewish War). From the perspective of that tradition it might appear that Papias was hugely disadvantaged, in that he seems never to have left Hierapolis (or at least not on any journey of relevance to his literary production) and could claim neither autopsy nor to have interviewed eyewitnesses directly. He would seem to be worthy of the scorn that Polybius lavished on Timaeus for never leaving Athens for fifty years and relying solely on written sources available to him in the libraries of that city. Papias might, like the historians lampooned by Lucian, simply have invented claims that would meet the ideals of the historiographical tradition of autopsy and enquiry. Instead, to his credit, he made the best of what he could honestly claim. He did not, he says, rely principally on written sources, but on oral information derived, within living memory of the events, from eyewitnesses, by a short chain of tradents whom he could specify, while the bulk of this oral material derived at only second hand from two eyewitnesses who were still alive when he interrogated their disciples about what they were saying. The presupposition is that the value of the historian’s information is determined by the degree of his closeness to a living source.⁴¹ Papias cannot claim direct access to the events, and so he makes the best of what he can claim: access to living eyewitnesses through only one stage of mediation. The supposed advantage over the use of written sources was that he could assure himself of the reliability of his oral sources through personal enquiry.

Without repeating too much of what I wrote in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, I shall substantiate and develop the sketch just given by way of some discussion of the well known passage Eusebius quotes from Papias’s preface:

οὐκ ὀκνήσω δέ σοι καὶ ὅσα ποτὲ παρὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καλῶς ἔμαθον καὶ καλῶς ἐμνημόνευσα, συγκατατάξαι ταῖς ἐρμηνείαις, διαβεβαιούμενος ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἀλήθειαν. οὐ γὰρ τοῖς τὰ πολλὰ λέγουσιν ἔχαιρον ὥσπερ οἱ πολλοί, ἀλλὰ τοῖς τάληθῆ διδάσκουσιν, οὐδὲ τοῖς τὰς ἀλλοτρίας ἐντολὰς μνημονεύουσιν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς τὰς παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου τῆ πίστει δεδομένας καὶ ἀπ’ αὐτῆς παραγινομένας τῆς ἀληθείας· εἰ δέ που καὶ παρηκολουθηκῶς τις τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις ἔλθοι, τοὺς τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἀνέκρινον λόγους, τί Ἀνδρέας ἢ τί Πέτρος εἶπεν ἢ τί Φίλιππος ἢ τί Θωμᾶς ἢ Ἰάκωβος ἢ τί Ἰωάννης ἢ Ματθαῖος ἢ τις ἕτερος τῶν τοῦ κυρίου μαθητῶν ἃ τε Ἀριστίων καὶ ὁ πρεσβύτερος Ἰωάννης, τοῦ κυρίου μαθηταὶ, λέγουσιν. οὐ γὰρ τὰ ἐκ τῶν βιβλίων τοσοῦτόν με ὠφελεῖν ὑπελάμβανον ὅσον τὰ

³⁹ David E. Aune, ‘Prolegomena to the Study of Oral Traditions in the Hellenistic World,’ in *Jesus and the Oral Gospel Tradition*, ed. Henry Wansborough (JSNTSup 64; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) 81.

⁴⁰ Bauckham, *Jesus*, chapter 2.

⁴¹ For this as the key issue in the Greek historiographical tradition of assessing sources, see Guido Schepens, ‘History and *Historia*: Inquiry in the Greek Historians,’ in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, ed. John Maricola (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) 39-55, here 48.

παρὰ ζώσης φωνῆς καὶ μενούσης (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.3-4).

I shall not hesitate also to put into ordered form for you, along with the interpretations, everything I learned carefully in the past from the elders and noted down carefully, for the truth of which I vouch. For unlike most people I took no pleasure in those who told many different stories,⁴² but only in those who taught the truth. Nor did I take pleasure in those who reported their memory of someone else's commandments, but only in those who reported their memory of the commandments given by the Lord to the faith and proceeding from the Truth itself. And if by chance anyone who had been in attendance on the elders arrived, I made enquiries about the words of the elders – [that is] what [according to the elders] Andrew or Peter said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples [said], and whatever Aristion and John the Elder, the Lord's disciples, were saying. For I did not think that information from the books would profit me as much as information from a living and surviving voice.⁴³

In *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* I translated the opening words of the quotation thus: 'I shall not hesitate also to put into properly ordered form for you everything I learned ...' I was adopting Kürzinger's suggestion that Papias uses ἐρμηνεία here in the common sense of 'literary expression,'⁴⁴ which is how Lucian uses it in his discussion of 'how to write history' (*Hist. conscr.* 24; 43; cf. 34). But I now think Baum is right to question whether this is grammatically possible.⁴⁵ It might be possible if Papias had written εἰς τὰς ἐρμηνείας, but parallels show that συγκατατάσσω with an accusative and a dative means 'to arrange X together with Y.' In that case ταῖς ἐρμηνείαις must refer to interpretations. Norelli, accepting that it means interpretations, claims that comparable examples show that in such a construction X (accusative) is included in Y (dative),⁴⁶ but I do not think the examples he cites show this.⁴⁷ What Papias learned from the elders is not included in the interpretations, but it is closely associated with the interpretations, perhaps more so than an English translation easily conveys. Papias speaks of arranging his information together with

⁴² For this translation, see Mansfeld, 'Galen,' 325 and n. 36: 'The contrast between "many different (πολλὰ) accounts" and the "truth" is as old as Hesiod, *Theog.* 26-27.'

⁴³ My translation. Compared with my translation in *Jesus*, 15-16, based largely on Lightfoot, Harmer and Holmes, this is a more careful translation that embodies in a number of ways what I consider to be my better understanding of the passage in the light of further study.

⁴⁴ Kürzinger, *Papias*, 80-81. He translates συντάξαι (the reading he prefers to συγκατατάξαι) ταῖς ἐρμηνείαις as 'in den Ausführungen geordnet darzustellen' (99).

⁴⁵ Baum, 'Papias,' 270-271.

⁴⁶ Norelli, *Papias*, 251. He translates: 'Non esiterò a disporre in ordine per te, includendolo tra le interpretazioni, anche tutto ciò che un tempo ho ben appreso...' (231).

⁴⁷ He cites three examples in which the object is included and one in which it is not. But, as he says, two of the three examples of inclusion have εἰς with the accusative, not the dative as in Papias. The one that does have the dative is Cyril of Alexandria, *Theos.* 25.236. In this discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, Cyril says: 'If the title Firstborn ranges the Son along with the creation (συγκατατάττει τῇ κτίσει), the appellation Only-Begotten wholly removes him from it.' I take it Norelli thinks Cyril's point requires the translation 'ranges the Son within the creation,' but I wonder whether this is the case. He is replying to Arians who said that the Son must be a creature because he is called 'the Firstborn of all creation.' Cyril may actually be intending to say that the Son as Firstborn is ranged along with the creation, his younger siblings, rather than that he is included in it.

interpretations. This reference to interpretations is not an obviously historiographical comment and may be thought a difficulty for the case that Papias writes a preface modeled on historiographical prefaces. I shall return to this point after discussing the more obviously historiographical features.

While Kürzinger seems to be mistaken about ταῖς ἐρμηνείαις, he may be right to take ἐμνημόνευσα in the sense of ‘recorded’ or ‘made memoranda.’⁴⁸ There is no reason why Papias should use the verb at this point in the same sense as he uses it a little later (‘those who recalled, i.e. reported their memory of someone else’s commandments’), as Norelli maintains.⁴⁹ It makes no sense to say that Papias learned the information and reported it (to whom?) before setting it in order in his literary work. It makes good sense that he followed the practice of the historian as described by Lucian:

When he has collected all or most of the facts let him first make them into a series of notes (ὑπομνημά), a body of material as yet with no beauty or continuity. Then, after arranging them into order (ἐπιθεῖς τὴν τάξιν), let him give it beauty and enhance it with the charms of expression, figure and rhythm (*Hist. conscr.* 48; LCL translation).⁵⁰

Papias’s emphasis on the carefulness (καλῶς) with which he learned and made notes is typical of the historians’ stress on their painstaking efforts to acquire and to record accurate information.

Another, actually prior stage in historical research is indicated later when Papias says that he ‘made enquiries of’ or ‘interrogated’ (ἀνέκρινον) disciples of the elders who came to Hierapolis. Such ‘enquiry’ of eyewitnesses or those who knew eyewitnesses was one of the two key elements – autopsy and enquiry – to which Greek historians from Thucydides onwards consistently referred as constituting the essence of historical research.⁵¹ Enquiry was ἱστορία in its narrowest sense. But the verb ἀνακρίνω and the noun ἀνάκρισις are regularly used of the historian’s questioning of their oral informants (e.g. Polybius 12.4c.5; 12.27.3; 12.28a.10). Polybius can equate ἱστορία (enquiry) with ἀνακρίσεις (investigations) and castigate Timaeus for entirely neglecting this, the most important part of history (12.4c.2-3). According to Lucian, ‘As to the facts themselves, [the historian] should not assemble them at random, but only after much laborious and painstaking investigation (ἀνακρίναντα)’ (*Hist. conscr.* 47; LCL). Papias would not have used ἀνακρίνω lightly, for it does not refer to casual questioning, but to close and critical examination – either of witnesses by

⁴⁸ Kürzinger, *Papias*, 78-79, cf. 48-49, where he argues for this sense in Papias’s note about Mark, citing K. L. Schmidt (without page reference!).

⁴⁹ Norelli, *Papias*, 253.

⁵⁰ Lucian, of course, wrote considerably later than Papias, but the extent to which he concurs with traditional ideas about historiography has been amply demonstrated by Gert Avenarius, *Lukians Schrift zur Geschichtsschreibung* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1956). Aristoula Georgiadou and David H. J. Larmour, ‘Lucian and Historiography: “De Historia Conscribenda” and “Verae Historiae,”’ *ANRW* 2.34.2 (1994) 1448-15.., here 1450-1470, show that Lucian regards history very much in the tradition of Polybius, though he probably used intermediate sources rather than Polybius directly.

⁵¹ John Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 80: ‘Nearly all contemporary historians [i.e. those who wrote contemporary history] make these claims.’ He lists 31 historians from Thucydides to Ammianus.

magistrates or of eyewitnesses by historians. It is part of his claim to have carefully ascertained the truth from people he knew to be in a position to relate it to him.

'Truth' is a key theme in this section of Papias's preface. He uses the word three times, initially to say that he guarantees the truth of the information he carefully learned from the elders and recorded. The sense becomes progressively more theological, as, in the second use of the word, he refers to his informants (the elders) as those who 'teach the truth.' They are not ordinary informants, but teachers⁵² who reported with authority what they had heard from the disciples of Jesus. Finally, he describes what they reported – the sayings of Jesus – as 'the commandments given by the Lord to the faith and proceeding from the Truth itself.' Probably the two participial phrases are parallel, and 'the Truth' refers to Jesus, rather than to God.⁵³ In this way, Papias gives the theme of 'truth' in his work a peculiarly Christian development, but it is a development that begins from an ordinary assurance of the truth of what he learned from his oral sources, such as a historian might make. In this respect, it corresponds to the historians' habitual use of the theme of truth, which is regularly treated as one of the most important aims of history. Truth is the aim of history for Thucydides (1.20.3), for Polybius (2.56.10, 12; 34.4.2) and for Josephus (*Ant.* 20.157). For Lucian, 'free expression and truth' (παρρησία καὶ ἀλήθεια) should be the aims of history (*Hist. conscr.* 41; 44; and for the importance of truth in history, see also 7; 9; 13; 40; 42; 63), for Dionysius of Halicarnassus 'truth and justice' (*Ant.* 1.6.5).⁵⁴ Without truth, according to Polybius, history becomes a useless fable (12.12.1-3). In such contexts, Truth is sometimes personified (Lucian, *Hist. conscr.* 40; Dionysius Hal., *Ant.* 1.1.2). Not surprisingly, then, truth is often a topic in historiographical prefaces (e.g. Josephus, *BJ* 1.6; Herodian 1.1.1-2; Dionysius Hal., *Ant.* 1.1.2; 1.6.5). Papias has taken this standard historiographical *topos* and given it a development coherent with the fact that he regards the material of his own historical enquiry as *logia* – authoritative utterances of the one who is Truth itself.

I shall postpone what Papias says about 'a living and surviving voice' and 'the books' until the next section of this paper, but here I must take up a few possible problems for the proposal that Papias presents himself as a historian. First, it is clear that Papias addressed his preface to a dedicatee, though the name has not survived in the portion Eusebius excerpts. Loveday Alexander, in discussions of Luke's two prefaces,⁵⁵ has pointed out that none of the extant prefaces of Greek historians includes a dedication. However, I do not see that this absence of a dedication can be considered essential, such that a writer who chose to take the unusual step of addressing a dedicatee in his preface would thereby disqualify his work from being considered history. According to Alexander, 'The

⁵² Note also the frequent connexion of the 'living voice' commonplace with teaching.

⁵³ *Contra* MacDonald, *Two Shipwrecked Gospels*, 16 n. 24.

⁵⁴ For more material see Avenarius, *Lukians Schrift*, 40-46. On truth in historiography in Polybius and Lucian, see also Georgiadou and Larmour, 'Lucian,' 1462-1470.

⁵⁵ Loveday Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1* (SNTSMS 78; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 27-29; eadem, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context* (London: T. & T. Clark [Continuum], 2008) 30-32.

apostrophe of the second person, whether in direct address (vocative) or in epistolary form, does not fit with the impersonal third-person narrative style of history, and was generally avoided.⁵⁶ However, the third-person style is by no means characteristic of historiographical *prefaces*, despite the fact that Herodotus and Thucydides employed it there. Historians in their prefaces frequently and freely speak in the first person (Herodian 1.1.3; 2 Macc 2:25-32; Josephus, *BJ* 1.1-30; *Ant.* 1.1-26; Dionysius Hal., *Ant.* 1.1.1-1.8.4), even when they avoid it in the rest of their work. (Polybius speaks in the first person quite frequently throughout his work.) This cannot be the reason for the lack of dedication. John Marincola connects the lack of dedications with the constant concern of historians to avoid accusations of bias and to maintain the persona of the disinterested historian, free of obligation to a patron and writing not for one person's interest, but for all readers and especially for posterity.⁵⁷ If Papias were aware of these issues, he could have chosen to disregard them. The fact that he was a leader in a small religious movement not yet a century old might have given him a different attitude to these things.

Secondly, what about ταῖς ἐρμηνείαις? If, as I have argued, this has to mean 'interpretations,' it does not, so far as I know, belong to the standard language in which historians discussed historiography. But if most historians avoided interrupting the flow of their narratives with interpolated comments, we should remember that Polybius, concerned as he was that his readers should understand the events he recounted, was a major exception to this policy. Papias's 'interpretations' have often been thought to indicate a genre quite different from historiography because they have been understood as implying a text + lemma structure to his work. But this need not be the case at all. In the extant fragments of Papias, we could identify three examples of 'interpretations': (1) In Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.33.3-4 (N 1, H 14), following the lengthy prediction by Jesus of the marvels of the coming kingdom, Papias comments: 'These things are believable to those who believe.' This comment is closely integrated into the account, for it precedes Judas's question, which expresses incredulity. Judas is revealed as one of those who do not believe. (2) Papias's statement that James and John were killed by Jews (we do not have his words) was probably a comment on a version of the saying of Jesus in Mark 10:39-40, explaining how Jesus' prophecy was fulfilled.⁵⁸ (3) Papias's account of the death of Judas (N 6, H 18) begins: 'Judas was a terrible, walking example of ungodliness in this world...' If these are representative of what Papias means by 'interpretations,' it becomes credible that he did not see them as inconsistent with an intention to write history.

Thirdly, Papias's subject matter would not have qualified as a worthy subject of 'history,' as the major tradition of Greek historiography understood it. It would be more plausibly the subject of a *bios*. However, we should note, in the first

⁵⁶ Alexander, *The Preface*, 27; cf. *Acts*, 30.

⁵⁷ Marincola, *Authority*, 53-57.

⁵⁸ According to Philip of Side Papias said this in his second book. This means that, if my hypothesis about the structure of Papias's work is correct, it was not a narrative about James and John in the section in which Papias collected stories about the mission of the disciples after Easter.

place, that history and biography differed in content, not necessarily in research methods. The author of a biography written within living memory of its subject might well employ the same methods of researching his work as would be expected of a writer of contemporary history, and the reliability of his work could be judged by the same standards. But, secondly, Papias may well have conceived his work as something more than a *bios*, if, as I have suggested, he introduced it with an account of the primeval history interpreted christologically. For him the story and sayings of Jesus were of world historical significance. In his eccentrically Christian way he might have seen himself as writing something like universal history.

Nothing I have said in this section is meant to suggest that Papias actually wrote anything in the least like the work of such historians as Lucian would have approved, though it may not have been so very different from some of those Lucian lampoons. The proposal is simply that Papias thought of himself as a historian. Papias was not lacking in education (though some scholars writing about him seem to suppose this). Even Eusebius does not say that he lacked education, only that he lacked intelligence (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.13). There is no reason why he should not have been sufficiently well read in Greek historiography to try to portray his work as belonging to that tradition. He had picked up enough about what the historians regarded as good historical method to make his actually quite modest claim to have dealt in the proper fashion with the best he could access by way of oral information close to eyewitness autopsy.

The living voice and the books

What Papias means when he says that he ‘did not think that information from the books would profit me as much as information from a living and surviving voice (παρὰ ζώσης φωνῆς καὶ μενούσης),’ has been very widely misunderstood. Papias does not express a general preference for orality or even oral tradition over books. He does not use the phrase ‘living voice’ as a metaphorical reference to oral tradition, but as a reference to the actual voice of the two eyewitnesses who were still alive in Asia at the time of which he is writing.⁵⁹ A failure by many scholars to grasp adequately the temporal indications in this fragment of Papias’s preface has a lot to do with the misunderstanding. Papias is referring to a time when he was collecting sayings of Jesus from oral sources. From the perspective of the time when he completed his work and wrote the preface, this was a time in the past. At that time most of the disciples of Jesus were already dead and therefore he enquired of the disciples of the elders, who had known them, what these disciples of Jesus *had said* (εἶπεν). In the case of Aristion and John the Elder, on the other hand, he enquired about what they *were saying* (λέγουσιν). These were also disciples of Jesus but they were still alive and no doubt teaching in Asia at that time. There is no chronological difficulty in supposing either that they really were personal disciples of Jesus or that they were still living, because Papias is describing a period in the past, presumably around the 80s CE. When Papias adapts the common expression ‘living voice’ in a way unique to him, expanding it to ‘living and surviving voice’ he does so precisely in order to

⁵⁹ This is not a new insight. For example, Rupert Annand, ‘Papias and the Four Gospels,’ *SJT* 9 (1956) 46-62, here 46-48, recognizes that Papias’s phrase refers directly to the two surviving eyewitnesses, though the rest of Annand’s argument is not plausible.

apply it to these two eyewitnesses who were still alive. The use of ‘surviving’ is comparable to that of 1 Cor 15:6 and John 21:22, which use the same verb to refer to eyewitnesses who are still alive at the time of writing.

In expressing his preference for a ‘living voice’ over ‘books’ Papias is certainly making use of an ancient *topos*, which has now benefited from several significant recent studies.⁶⁰ There is good evidence that it was a common saying (Galen, *De comp. med. sec. loc.* 6 pref.⁶¹; *De alim. fac.* 6⁶²; Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.2.8; Pliny, *Ep.* 2.3), but it is very important to note that Alexander, Baum and Mansfeld all point out that it was put to different uses in different contexts. In the context of scientific and technical treatises such as Galen’s, it expresses the easily understandable attitude that learning a craft by oral instruction from a practitioner was preferable to learning from a book. Seneca applied it to philosophy, advising that personal experience of a teacher made for much more effective learning than reading books (*Ep.* 6.5). Quintilian and Pliny, discussing rhetoric, made the point that the ‘living voice’ of an orator had a communicative power that could not be matched by books. Plato evidently wrote before the currency of the saying itself, but spoke of the superiority of the ‘living word’ (λόγος ζῶν) over written words, in that books, unlike people, cannot answer questions and so leave themselves open to misunderstanding (*Phdr.* 274a-277a).⁶³ It should be said that all of these attitudes make obviously good sense in the circumstances to which they refer. There is no need, in cases where this *topos* occurs, to attribute a *general* ‘scepticism towards the written word’ to these authors.⁶⁴ As Mansfeld observes, in the case of Galen and others who speak of the advantages of learning directly from a teacher, they ‘represent a position today’s average teacher or tutor would undoubtedly be prepared to share,’⁶⁵ although electronic media now offer different possibilities. Moreover, all of the authors who use the *topos* wrote books (by definition!), as Papias did. They thought books had their uses. Galen even explains the circumstances in which books could be an adequate substitute for a living teacher.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Heinrich Karpp, ‘Viva Vox,’ in *Mullus: Festschrift Theodor Klauser*, ed. Alfred Stuiber and Alfred Hermann (JAC Ergänzungsband 1; Münster: Aschendorff, 1964) 190-198; Loveday A. Alexander, ‘The Living Voice: Scepticism Towards the Written Word in Early Christian and in Graeco-Roman Texts,’ in *The Bible in Three Dimensions*, ed. David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl and Stanley E. Porter (JSOTSup 87; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990) 221-247; Pieter J. J. Botha, ‘Living Voice and Lifeless Letters: Reserve Towards Writing in the Graeco-Roman World,’ *HTS* 49 (1993) 742-759; Armin Daniel Baum, ‘Papias, der Vorzug der *Viva Vox* und die Evangelienchriften,’ *NTS* 44 (1998) 144-151; Jaap Mansfeld, ‘Galen.’ (I have not been able to see Jaap Mansfeld, *Prolegomena: Questions to be Settled Before the Study of an Author, or a Text* [Philosophia antiqua 61; Leiden: Brill, 1994].)

⁶¹ Quoted in Alexander, ‘The Living Voice,’ 224-225.

⁶² Quoted in Mansfeld, ‘Galen,’ 318-319.

⁶³ Another context in which orality was preferred to writing was in the case of esoteric teaching that is suitable only for the few (e.g. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.13.2), but I have not seen the *topos* applied to this context.

⁶⁴ Outside the context of this *topos*, the phrase ‘living voice’ is simply a way of saying ‘orally’ or ‘in person,’ with no necessary implication of superiority over writing. E.g. Eusebius says that the Alexandrian Christian teacher Pantaenus ‘orally (ζῶσῃ φωνῇ) and in writing expounded the treasures of the divine doctrine’ (*Hist. Eccl.* 5.10.4).

⁶⁵ Mansfeld, ‘Galen,’ 321.

⁶⁶ Mansfeld, ‘Galen,’ 319-320; Alexander, ‘The Living Voice,’ 230.

In every instance I have seen, what the saying means by ‘living voice’ is firsthand experience of a speaker, whether an instructor or an orator, not the transmission of tradition through a chain of traditioners across generations. Certainly, in the schools, such tradition was highly valued. Mansfeld quotes, as a partial ‘parallel for the preamble of Papias’ work,’ a passage in which Galen speaks of the value of a continuous oral tradition, passed down by a succession of pupils, over as much as five centuries, but, as he admits, the expression ‘the living voice’ is not used!⁶⁷ In every instance of this phrase that I have seen, in the quite numerous texts so usefully assembled and discussed by the scholars I have cited, the ‘living voice’ is the actual voice of a living speaker from whom one hears what he has to say directly. We must draw the obvious conclusion that in the case of Papias, as Harry Gamble already pointed out in 1995, ‘it is not oral tradition as such that Papias esteemed, but first-hand information. To the extent that he was able to get information directly, he did so and preferred to do so.’⁶⁸

Since the *topos* was applied in a variety of different contexts, in which the reasons why the oral medium was thought preferable to books varied according to the matter in question, it need be no surprise that Papias imports it into yet another such context, where the preference for oral information is essentially a historiographical one. Even though Papias was evidently only able to hear what the ‘living voice’ was saying in reports by people who had heard it (and so at one remove from first-hand experience of the speakers), this was preferable to books, of whose authorship one might not be sure and whose testimony one cannot interrogate to verify authenticity. If this is Papias’s meaning it follows that τῶν βιβλίων are not, as in most translations, just ‘books’ (books in general, disparaged in a general preference for orality), but ‘the books,’ i.e. the books from which Papias could have gained his knowledge of the sayings of Jesus. Probably he did not then know as many such books (Gospels) as he knew by the time he completed his work and wrote the preface, but he knew some. They were probably in use in his church.

Papias’s preference for the ‘living voice’ is only comparative: he ‘did not think that information from the books would profit me *as much as* information from a living and surviving voice.’ Moreover, he says this *qua* would-be historian, not *qua* mere Christian believer. It is a question of what would be most useful to him in his task of compiling his own written collection of Jesus traditions. He collects this oral information from the last surviving eyewitnesses *precisely in order to write it down*. What counts is his closeness to his eyewitness sources and therefore the reliability of his access to them. By these criteria he judges the oral information more useful for his purpose than the books.

The final question we must pose is whether Papias did use written Gospels as sources, in addition to his oral information, when he actually wrote his book. If we had the whole of his preface (not to mention a few more substantial bits of the rest of his five books) we would probably know the answer. As it is, I am not sure that we can. Certainly, nothing Papias says rules out the possibility that he used written sources. Most of the historians, including Polybius, who insisted

⁶⁷ Mansfeld, ‘Galen,’ 322-323.

⁶⁸ Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 30-31.

that autopsy and enquiry were the historian's true means of research (for the history within living memory to which they confined themselves), actually made considerable use of written sources. Papias need not be an exception, and his *comparative* evaluation of oral and written information leaves open the possibility that he used written sources explicitly but in a subordinate role.

The καὶ near the beginning of the section Eusebius quotes implies that he had already said something else about what he was providing for his dedicatee, but we cannot tell what it was. In view of the preference he expresses, in the section we have, for oral information, it does not seem likely that he discussed his written sources first and then, in the section we have, his oral sources.⁶⁹ But it was common in historiographical prefaces to discuss those who had previously attempted the same historical task as the present author. The main purpose was to justify the present author's work as doing something so far left undone. So it may be that the comments on the Gospels of Mark and Matthew that Eusebius quotes served that purpose (and may have occurred before or after the section Eusebius first quotes). Papias aimed to supply the deficiencies he notes in the Gospels of Mark and (at least in the Greek translation that was current) of Matthew.

However, there is a problem with this proposal. The limitations Papias points out in these Gospels stem from the fact that Mark (unlike Peter, his source) was not an eyewitness ('for he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied him') and nor were the translators of Matthew (unlike Matthew himself). But in that case how could Papias claim to be in a better position than they? In *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, I argued that Papias's comments on the Gospels of Mark and Matthew make very good sense if he was comparing them with another Gospel that was directly authored by an eyewitness and had the 'order' they lacked. This was the Gospel of John.⁷⁰ (Eusebius would have suppressed Papias's comments on John because he had good reason for not liking what Papias said.) In that case, in his own work, Papias could have drawn on the Gospel of John to supply what neither the Gospels of Mark and Matthew nor his own researches (not being an eyewitness himself) could. In particular, Papias may have used John's Gospel to provide a chronological framework for the λόγια κυριακά he had collected himself. This a hypothesis that depends on the argument I cannot present here for Papias's knowledge of the Gospel of John and its authorship by John the Elder,⁷¹ whose 'living and surviving voice' Papias had so much valued.

⁶⁹ This is suggested, e.g., by Theo K. Heckel, *Vom Evangelium des Markus zum viergestaltigen Evangelium* (WUNT 120; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999) 226.

⁷⁰ Bauckham, *Jesus*, 222-230.

⁷¹ Bauckham, *Jesus*, chapter 16.