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The Gospel of Barnabas, the Diatessaron, and Method

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the 20th century research aiming at reconstructing Tatian's lost Gospel harmony *Diatessaron* utilizes a growing number of late 13-15 c. texts extant in various Western vernaculars for this purpose. As the most recent example Jan Joosten introduced the so-called *Gospel of Barnabas*, a composition perhaps as late as the 16th or 17th century as a potential source for readings of the *Diatessaron* (2nd c.). With special emphasis on methodological issues, this essay offers a detailed critique of Joosten's analysis as well as a general critique of that type of research as carried out by other scholars in the past.

In a recent article Jan Joosten aimed at linking the *Gospel of Barnabas* with the *Diatessaron*.¹ The *Gospel of Barnabas* is available in an Italian manuscript dated to the end of the sixteenth century and a Spanish manuscript from the eighteenth century; the composition of the text itself is usually dated to around the year 1600; the author is unknown.² The *Diatessaron* on the other hand stems from the second half of the second century.³ It is known to be a Gospel harmony from the pen of Tatian the 'Assyrian', a pupil of the apologist Justin Martyr and in his own right a vivid apologist of his Christian belief

¹ J. Joosten, "The *Gospel of Barnabas* and the *Diatessaron*", *HTR* 95, 2002, 73-96.

² For a brief description of the research into the so-called *Gospel of Barnabas*, see J. Joosten, *ibid.*, 73-75.

³ On the *Diatessaron* and its research history see W.L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron. Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship*, *VigChr.S.* 25, Leiden 1994.

‘against the Greeks,’⁴ and—the Diatessaron is lost! Not a single copy of the original composition has been handed down to us. On the face of it, the task of establishing a link between a renaissance production and a—lost—late second-century Gospel harmony appears futile. Joosten, however, calls into evidence the so-called ‘Old Latin Diatessaron’, a hypothetical early translation of Tatian’s Diatessaron into Latin, in order to identify the missing link between the two texts in question.

With that approach Joosten places himself within a long-standing tradition of scholarly research into Tatian’s Diatessaron. In this tradition scholars have tried to link a vast range of sources from very different provenances and in many languages and dialects ranging from ancient Syriac to Medieval Dutch, and from Christian Arabic to Renaissance Italian. The aim of this research is ultimately to hark back to a common underlying textual substratum that is believed to derive from Tatian’s Diatessaron. In order to reach that goal scholars work almost like detectives in isolating verbal agreements between some of these sources against others, in order to identify possible links and common sources. Joosten’s article mentioned here is indeed an impressive example of this type of research.

This approach, however, is not without problems and has not been undisputed. In this article we aim at presenting the main points of critique against the method employed in Diatessaronic research. In our analysis this critique clearly exhibits fundamental weaknesses that call for reorientation. Therefore, we will also suggest more appropriate methodological procedures. For two reasons Joosten’s article is selected as reference for our discussion. First of all, it is one of the most recent representatives of Diatessaronic research. Secondly, in his article Joosten himself addresses methodological issues relevant to our discussion.

In our article we shall proceed in three steps. To start with, we shall outline how the ‘Old Latin Diatessaron’ was postulated and justified and became the backbone of Diatessaronic research. At the same time we shall expose the fundamental problems that are associated with this scholarly postulate. We are not dealing with the issue whether or not such an Old Latin Diatessaron ever existed. We more modestly aim at demonstrating that the Old Latin Diatessaron hypothesis as developed and applied by Diatessaronic scholarship is neither a necessary nor a plausible postulate for explaining the

⁴) Tatian’s written apology is known under the title *Oratio ad Graecos*. In it he describes himself as “born in the land of the Assyrians” (*Oratio* 42, ed. by M. Whittaker, *Tatian, Oratio ad Graecos and Fragments*, OECT, Oxford 1982).

evidence assembled by Diatessaronic scholarship. Secondly, we shall focus on the huge methodological challenges that result from such a great variety of sources. We use Joosten's analysis to illustrate how crucial it is seriously to explore the historical and literary context of the textual phenomena that are registered in these sources. In conclusion, we shall suggest a methodological procedure that is intended to meet the specific challenges posed by this type of research.

1. The Old Latin Diatessaron—a Necessary Scholarly Postulate or *Deus ex Machina*?⁵

As already indicated, Tatian's Diatessaron is lost. Not a single copy of this important late second-century document is known to us today. We cannot even be certain about the original language of the Diatessaron, although it must have been either Greek or Syriac. We do know, however, that this ancient Gospel harmony was in reverential use in Syriac churches until the beginning of the fifth century, when it became effectively replaced by the then widely accepted four Gospel canon of the Christian oikumene. On the other hand, we have not the slightest indication that Tatian's Diatessaron enjoyed similar ecclesiastical esteem in areas outside Syriac Christianity. It is, therefore, a rather strange coincidence to find that the oldest physical object representing a complete Gospel harmony is a Latin manuscript from the middle of the sixth century, written in upper Italy. This precious artifact, known as Codex Fuldensis (Stadt- und Landesbibliothek Fulda, Bonifatiushandschrift 1),⁶ is also notable for being one of the oldest remains of a fine early Vulgate text, especially of its Gospel text. Today it is undisputed that the Codex Fuldensis Gospel harmony ultimately goes back to Tatian's Diatessaron. At the same time, the Vulgate appearance of the harmony betrays clear evidence of its secondary nature, because that type of text is associated with Jerome and hardly existed before 400 CE. This fact renders Codex Fuldensis, in spite of its exceptional age, in the view of modern scholars most unsuitable for reconstructing the exact wording of Tatian's (lost) Diatessaron. Since the end of the nineteenth century, however, Diatessaronic

⁵ For a fuller treatment of this issue see U.B. Schmid, "In search of Tatian's Diatessaron in the West", *VigChr* 57, 2003, 176-199.

⁶ *Codex Fuldensis—Novum Testamentum Latine Interprete Hieronymo ex manuscripto Victoris Capuani edidit . . .*, ed. E. Ranke, Marburg und Leipzig 1868.

scholarship suspected the existence of another version of Tatian's Diatessaron, besides Codex Fuldensis, which must have been operative in the West.⁷ In the first half of the twentieth century a growing number of scholars became convinced that this other version must have been what they used to call an Old Latin Diatessaron.⁸ The observations that led to this conviction arose from mainly studying *vernacular* Gospel harmonies extant in medieval Dutch, German and Italian. Upon comparison between those vernacular harmonies and the oldest Latin harmony, namely Vulgate Codex Fuldensis, lists of variants were compiled in which the younger vernacular harmonies seemed to be supported by older pre-Vulgate traditions, like Old Latin texts or—even more important—what are considered to be Eastern Diatessaronic witnesses. Two conclusions were drawn from these findings. First of all, the readings in question could not have been transmitted through Codex Fuldensis, since they are not found in it. Secondly, these readings appear to represent an older textual stratum, predating the Vulgate appearance of Codex Fuldensis, and thus apparently closer to the original Diatessaron, as evidenced by comparison with Eastern sources. As a consequence, Diatessaronic scholarship developed the hypothesis of an Old Latin version of Tatian's Diatessaron as old as pre-200 CE, and hence very close to the original composition, which is usually dated to post 160 CE.⁹ Therefore, an essentially two step method became something like a 'standard' procedure in Diatessaronic studies: a) screening vernacular Gospel harmonies of quite late dates and differing types against Vulgate Codex Fuldensis, b) for the differences looking for parallels in remote branches of the Gospel text tradition, preferably in what are considered to be Eastern Diatessaronic witnesses. As a result, the outlines of an Old Latin Diatessaron emerged, by computing individual readings answering to a) and b).

It is important to note that there is no external historical reference to any Old Latin Diatessaron. Nor has any Latin copy of an Old Latin Diatessaron been preserved for us to see and scrutinize. All we have is the process described, in which a number of readings have been isolated which are attributed to the Old Latin Diatessaron. Hence the Old Latin Diatessaron is nothing more than a scholarly postulate. Is it a necessary postulate? Is it the sole explanation for the textual evidence assembled by Diatessaronic scholarship

⁷) Th. Zahn, "Zur Geschichte von Tatians Diatessaron im Abendland", *NKZ* 5, 1894, 85-120.

⁸) See especially the pioneering studies by D. Plooi, *A Primitive Text of the Diatessaron*, Leiden 1923; idem, *A Further Study of the Liège Diatessaron*, Leiden 1925.

⁹) D. Plooi, *A Primitive Text*, 74.

or are there alternative explanations? What is the design of the Old Latin Diatessaron hypothesis? In the following we shall raise three objections against this hypothesis:

- a) The OL Diatessaron hypothesis raises more questions than it answers;
- b) The OL Diatessaron hypothesis is based on unsafe textual analysis;
- c) The OL Diatessaron hypothesis is based on anachronistic assumptions and anachronistic use of source material

1.a. *The OL Diatessaron Hypothesis Raises More Questions Than It Answers*

One of the major problems in Diatessaronic studies is how to cope with the textual diversity within the western vernacular harmonies. Very often a reading that is attributed to the Old Latin Diatessaron is present in only one western witness, e.g. in one of the Dutch harmonies, and absent from all the other western vernacular harmonies. Another supposed Old Latin Diatessaron reading is present in one of the Italian harmonies, but absent in all the other Italian, Dutch, English, German harmonies, and so on.¹⁰ How can *the* Old Latin Diatessaron in the singular survive within the multitude of often rather inconsistent vernacular harmony witnesses? In order to account for that problem, Diatessaronic scholarship used the concept of 'vulgarization'. 'Vulgarization' means the process of adapting the witnesses to a Vulgate standard in the course of an ongoing textual transmission. This process must have been operative in individual cases, resulting in different patterns of Old Latin readings left in the individual vernacular harmony witnesses.

If we now translate this concept back into the overall framework of the Old Latin Diatessaron hypothesis, we arrive at a more complicated scenario than the denominator Old Latin Diatessaron in the singular suggests. How can *the* Old Latin Diatessaron be made historically accountable for the many different patterns of Old Latin readings which are found in the vernacular sources? At present we know of 37 medieval Dutch, 32 medieval German, 32 medieval Italian and one medieval English harmony manuscripts which have either been used in Diatessaronic scholarship or belong to the main

¹⁰ Cf. the examples in W.L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron*, 307. Of the six potentially Diatessaronic readings mentioned there, two are found only in one of the Dutch harmonies, two others only in one of the High German harmony fragments, the fifth in just one Italian harmony, and the sixth only in a medieval English harmony.

type that has been used, i.e. the Codex Fuldensis type.¹¹ Moreover, many more manuscripts of other harmony types are known to exist in Dutch and German. The figures thus amount to about 100—potentially even more—slightly or considerably differing patterns of reminders of the Old Latin Diatessaron. Even if we do not assume the same amount of actual versions of the Old Latin Diatessaron to mediate those different patterns, we still have to allow for a rather wide-spread tradition of the Old Latin harmony. This amounts to a vast postulated textual tradition of a postulated document. How plausible is such a scenario given the fact that not a single copy of the Old Latin Diatessaron survived? In contrast to the Syriac version of Tatian's Diatessaron, we have no evidence indicating that the (Old) Latin Diatessaron was under any threat of being suppressed either for doctrinal or political reasons. Therefore, it is rather unlikely that such a textual tradition has been completely wiped out from history. But this is exactly what the Old Latin Diatessaron hypothesis wants us to believe: The Old Latin Diatessaron tradition, despite its powerful presence in the 13th-15th centuries—as evidenced by the many vernacular representatives—is gone without a trace in its original language. From a purely historical perspective this is very difficult to believe.

1.b. *The OL Diatessaron Hypothesis Is Based on Unsafe Textual Analysis*

Diatessaronic scholarship deals with a vast number of sources of different types,¹² from various times¹³ and in many languages.¹⁴ Yet at the same time many of the readings which are pronounced to be Diatessaron readings upon comparison between, e.g., ancient Syriac and late medieval German witnesses, involve textual trivia, like the substitution of synonyms and the addition or omission of possessive pronouns. The question whether or not many of those parallels could have been generated purely by chance has hardly ever

¹¹ These counts are based on research into the medieval western harmony tradition currently under way at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Whether a Gospel harmony is considered to belong to the Codex Fuldensis type, is solely based on aspects of narrative sequence, not on textual readings (e.g., Vulgate *versus* Old Latin).

¹² Beside Gospel harmonies, manuscripts of canonical and apocryphal Gospels are used, as well as quotations from Gospel texts found in Church writers treatises.

¹³ The sources range from early Gospel manuscripts of the third/fourth centuries to late Renaissance products like the Gospel of Barnabas.

¹⁴ Greek, Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Arabic, Persian, Dutch, German, Italian, English, Catalan.

been asked. Admittedly, specific cases of coincidental variation are not easy to prove beyond reasonable doubt. How does one demonstrate that two textual witnesses happen to agree in a specific reading by pure chance? On the sight of it, such a demonstration seems impossible. The history of Diatessaron research, however, provides us with compelling cases of ‘genealogy by chance’.

Whenever possible, Diatessaron scholars used sources that were available in print. From the bulk of the Latin harmonies only three have been edited. Apart from sixth-century Codex Fuldensis we have editions of two ninth-century manuscripts. The editions are of different qualities and none of them is without errors. It is highly interesting to note that Diatessaron scholarship happened unwittingly to hit on some of the errors and pronounced them to be likely readings of Tatian’s Diatessaron, although they only exist in the modern edition and not in the historical artifact. W.L. Petersen comments:

This was a knife through the heart of the ‘Methode der Diatessaronforschung’ [...]. If modern typographical and scholarly errors could, completely at random, generate readings which researchers pronounced to be ‘Tatianisms’, then, *mutatis mutandis*, could not similar errors in the past, in the long transmission history of the codices, have also, at random and without *any* relationship to the Diatessaron, generated similar errors—which, like the modern editors’ errors, would be proclaimed as ‘Diatessaronic readings’ by researchers? Any dispassionate observer had to answer, ‘Yes, similar random errors must have occurred in the past, and, yes, they had unquestionably generated “Diatessaronic” readings which had nothing to do with the Diatessaron.’¹⁵

One such empirical case of accidental variation is bound to shake the foundations of Diatessaronic methodology irreversibly.¹⁶ In his 1919 study *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Diatessaron im Abendland*, H.J. Vogels gave *inter alia* a list of 44 readings drawn from comparing two Latin harmony manuscripts. The manuscripts were Codex Fuldensis (6th c.) as available in an edition published in 1868 and Codex Cassellanus (9th c.) as available in an edition published in 1869.¹⁷ The 44 readings consist of textual deviations of

¹⁵ Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron*, 303-304.

¹⁶ For a detailed description of this case see U. Schmid, “Genealogy by Chance! On the significance of accidental variation (parallelism)”, in: *Studies in Stemmatology* II, ed. by P. van Reenen, A.A. den Hollander, M. van Mulken, Amsterdam 2004, 127-143.

¹⁷ C.W.M. Grein, *Die Quellen des Heliand. Nebst einem Anhang: Tatians Evangelienharmonie herausgegeben nach dem Codex Cassellanus*, Cassel 1869, 127-262.

the latter from the former, for which parallels are given from remote branches of the Gospel text tradition, such as Old Latin and Syriac manuscripts, and Greek patristic writers. This is exactly the type of textual analysis that is usually performed in Diatessaronic studies in order to isolate Old Latin and potentially Diatessaron readings. Upon comparison between the 44 readings drawn from the edition of Codex Cassellanus and a microfilm of the actual artifact, U. Schmid discovered that 24 of them are based on errors in Grein's edition. In other words: more than 50 per cent of Vogels' sample does not refer to readings of the 9th century manuscript but to readings of its 19th century edition. And yet, for all those readings Vogels presented parallels from the same type of remote ancient Gospel texts. It is, however, simply beyond imagination to suppose that the modern editor of 9th c. Codex Cassellanus, who happened to be a Germanist, either deliberately or unwittingly tintured his edition with readings taken over from ancient remote Gospel texts. Thus, there can be little doubt that Vogels' parallels do not represent genetic relationships between the 19th century edition and ancient Gospel texts. It is crucial to realize the sheer proportions in this case. The sample size is 44 readings with ancient Gospel text parallels; 24 of them demonstrably hit their parallels by chance. Since this includes more than 50 percent of the sample size, there is nothing significant left in the rest, because from a purely statistical point of view the remaining 20 readings could have hit their parallels by chance, too. This is a devastating result for the reliability of textual analysis of this kind.

1.c. The OL Diatessaron Hypothesis Is Based on Anachronistic Assumptions and Anachronistic Use of Source Material

In Diatessaronic scholarship the denomination 'Old Latin' basically means 'non-Vulgate', and usually alludes to the idea of pre-Vulgate as well. The underlying assumption is that once the Latin Vulgate came into being, all the older Latin versions of Scripture (the 'Old Latin' ones) became irreversibly superseded by *the* Vulgate, which is conceived as a monolithic entity. The concept of a monolithic, almost immaculate Latin Vulgate, throughout all of its history, is neither theoretically likely nor historically observable. On the contrary, the Latin Vulgate, being the single largest text tradition of the western hemisphere, must almost inevitably have produced a fair amount of variation during its 1200 years run up to the 'Clementine' edition, which was issued in 1592 as the definite edition of the Vulgate, aimed at restoring the original unaltered version. And in fact, the Latin Vulgate saw a lot of regional

differentiations and deliberate scholarly editions aimed either at restoring the original text or at least at restraining textual pluriformity. Thanks to the work of Bonifatius Fischer and others we have some idea of the complex history of the Vulgate in the first millenium, especially in Carolingian times (eighth/ninth centuries).¹⁸ As a result of this, in our perception of the textual history of the Latin Vulgate we have to allow for much more diversity, i.e. different Vulgate types, contamination between them, and still available Old Latin types, than was earlier thought possible. This is even more true for the history of the Vulgate in the second millenium. The sheer number of Vulgate manuscripts from the thirteenth century, for example, has never been textually researched and classified. Therefore, we simply cannot know the amount of variation and the degree of 'Old Latin' influx among the literally thousands of Vulgate manuscripts from the thirteenth century onwards. Yet, Diatessaronic scholarship is desperately in need of exactly that type of information, because all of their vernacular harmonies belong to the late-thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Readings which appear to be Old Latin from the perspective of the earliest and purest Vulgate representatives, of which Codex Fuldensis is a prime example, might turn out to be part of later developments of the textual history of the Latin Vulgate. Experts in the field actually reckon with a number of Old Latin readings in almost any Vulgate manuscript. The problem is that we do not know enough to map the later tradition and mine its richness for appropriate comparison with vernacular texts. We do know enough, however, to be fairly confident about the overall picture: The textual tradition of the Vulgate is less monolithic than Diatessaronic scholarship usually presupposes. General claims as to *the* reading of *the* Vulgate for every passage at any time for any given locale are simply beyond our present knowledge. This is especially true for the second millenium.

The calling upon an Old Latin Diatessaron seemed to be necessary because the vernacular harmonies displayed textual deviations when compared to the Vulgate type harmony from Codex Fuldensis. Codex Fuldensis, thus, could not have mediated those readings into the vernacular harmony tradition. This conclusion is quite obvious, but trivial at best, because Codex Fuldensis itself remained in Fulda from the eighth century onwards and was kept there as a precious relic of the Fulda monastery's founder St. Boniface. It

¹⁸) B. Fischer, *Lateinische Bibelhandschriften im frühen Mittelalter*, VL.AGLB 11, Freiburg 1985 and B. Bischof, *Mittelalterliche Studien: ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde und Literaturgeschichte*, 3 Vols, Stuttgart 1966-1981.

is not likely that any of the vernacular harmonies stemming from the late-thirteenth century onwards have been translated directly from Codex Fuldensis, eight hundred years after the manuscript was produced and more than five hundred years after it was deposited in Fulda. The chronological gap between, e.g., a fourteenth century Italian harmony and the sixth-century Codex Fuldensis is actually twice as large as the gap between Codex Fuldensis and Tatian's Diatessaron, the ultimate goal of Diatessaronic research. How then could Codex Fuldensis form a meaningful comparison base for late medieval vernacular harmonies? Such a shortcut could only be justified under two conditions: a) Codex Fuldensis is the sole extant Latin Gospel harmony witness, or b), in the case that there are more Latin Gospel harmony witnesses, Codex Fuldensis' readings could be taken, *pars pro toto*, to represent the full testimony of all the extant witnesses. However, neither of these conditions are met.

Codex Fuldensis generated a considerable textual tradition, of which at least seventeen witnesses dating to the twelfth/thirteenth centuries are still extant today.¹⁹ Every single item from this sample is a much more appropriate candidate to compare the vernacular harmonies with than Codex Fuldensis. Unfortunately, Diatessaronic scholarship has never investigated those largely unpublished manuscripts alongside the slightly later vernacular harmonies. What is worse is that Diatessaronic scholarship has completely overlooked evidence from some of the Latin harmony manuscripts mentioned that have actually been available in print. The evidence consists of lists of readings drawn from three thirteenth century harmony manuscripts and one fourteenth century one.²⁰ The samples are intended to highlight textual deviations from the manuscripts' common ancestor Codex Fuldensis. Although the lists are admittedly incomplete, they allow two important conclusions. First of all, the younger the manuscripts are, the further they appear to be textually removed from their ultimate ancestor. Secondly, a correspondingly large number of those textual deviations seems to have Old Latin support. In other words: The ongoing textual tradition of Codex Fuldensis' offspring takes on board more and more readings that appear

¹⁹) For an overview see U. Schmid, "Lateinische Evangelienharmonien—die Konturen der abendländischen Harmonietradition", in: *Evangelienharmonien des Mittelalters*, ed. C. Burger, A. den Hollander & U. Schmid, *Studies in Theology and Religion* 9, Assen 2004, 18-39.

²⁰) The evidence is found in H.J. Vogels, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Diatessaron im Abendland*, *NTA* 8,1, Münster 1919, 126-138.

to be Old Latin, at least non-mainstream-early-Vulgate. Thus, the gap between the basically Vulgate harmony tradition evidently stemming from Codex Fuldensis on the one hand, and the Old Latin flavoured vernacular harmony tradition is closing. This has serious consequences for the Old Latin Diatessaron as conceived by Diatessaronic scholarship, because the extant text tradition from the twelfth century onwards of the Fuldensis' offspring quite naturally takes the place of the Old Latin Diatessaron tradition. As a result, the postulate of an Old Latin Diatessaron is bound to become superfluous.

As a conclusion to the first part of our survey we want to emphasize the untenable character of the Old Latin harmony hypothesis as a scholarly postulate. It is not only historically implausible, it is simply not necessary for explaining the evidence assembled by Diatessaronic scholarship, because the extant tradition of the Codex Fuldensis offspring offers the appropriate means.

2. Inappropriate Use of Sources. On Apples and Oranges

In his article, Joosten deals with a vast range of sources from very different origins and in many languages and dialects ranging from ancient Syriac to Medieval Dutch, and from Christian Arabic to renaissance Italian. Notwithstanding this enormous variety, Joosten seeks to trace similarities between all these texts in terms of unique textual agreements or strikingly similar linguistic features. These similarities between eastern and western texts can then, according to Joosten, only be explained if these texts are interrelated. Of course he is aware of the fact that such comparison of remote texts is not the most obvious thing to do: "invoking variants in fourth-century Syriac texts in order to explain readings found in thirteenth-century Dutch or Italian texts is wont to appear farfetched to scholars whose main domain is Middle Dutch or Middle Italian literature".²¹ We intend to explain why Joosten in the article under discussion is not able to convince us along the lines of his procedure. The reason, to put it briefly, is that he studies certain textual and linguistic features of western medieval vernacular texts in complete isolation from their immediate context. Since he does not check whether and how these phenomena could be accounted for against the literary, codicological, historical, dialectal or other backgrounds of the text in which they were registered,

²¹) J. Joosten, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, 78.

Joosten's comparison of "fourth-century Syriac" and "thirteenth-century Dutch or Italian texts" looks like comparing apples with oranges.

Before we give the details in support of our charges, we want to emphasize that our focus is on the methodological implications of Joosten's use of sources rather than on discussing all of his evidence. Therefore, we expose a few examples to close scrutiny in order to highlight the problems of using such sources in this way.

2.a. *Unique Readings in Diatessaronic Witnesses*

Joosten considers certain textual agreements between some Eastern and Western (harmony) texts as an indication of mutual relationships. In most of the cases these agreements consist of deviations from what is considered to be the standard Latin or Greek text of the Gospels. Joosten goes on to state that he intends to present "unique readings in Diatessaronic Witnesses":²² striking variant readings which are only found in a Western Gospel Harmony and also in the Eastern Harmony tradition, but which are "not found in any Latin or Greek manuscript."²³ With this phrasing Joosten is skating on thin ice. In the first place, it would mean that he has actually studied all the known Latin and Greek manuscripts, which seems very unlikely. Furthermore, he takes it upon himself to prove that these "unique readings" can only be explained by (indirect) mutual dependency between an ancient Syriac and a medieval Dutch text. Joosten does not, for example, test the possibility that striking readings in the Dutch harmony text could have been mediated through contemporary medieval (Latin) exegetical tools. In an earlier publication we have already suggested that the most prominent of these tools for the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, namely the so-called *Glossa Ordinaria*, is a prime source for many of the striking readings found in the Liège *Life of Jesus*.²⁴ The *Glossa Ordinaria* is a more or less standardized set of expositions for every biblical book in the form of interlinear

²²) J. Joosten, *ibid.*, 80.

²³) J. Joosten, *ibid.*, 82. This assertion reoccurs in various forms ("... without analogy in the Greek and Latin traditions" [81]; "... completely isolated in the West" [81]).

²⁴) A. den Hollander/U. Schmid, "Middelieuwse bronnen van het Luikse *Leven van Jezus*," in: *Queeste* 6, 1999, 127-146. The idea of the *Glossa Ordinaria* as the prime source for the striking readings of the Liège *Life of Jesus* did not originate with us, but with C.C. de Bruin, *Het Luikse Diatessaron—Registers, CSSN, Misc. III, Leiden 1984, ix-xv.*

and marginal glosses appended to most biblical manuscripts of that period.²⁵ Since this 'standard apparatus' is also found in many of the 12/13th century copies of the Fuldensis harmony, we considered it the prime source for any western vernacular harmony from the late 13th century onwards containing what appear to be aberrant readings from the point of view of the 'normal' Vulgate Gospel text. It should be emphasized that Joosten acknowledged our findings:

Variants that had been claimed to occur in no other source but Ephraem's commentary or the Old Syriac gospels were identified either in medieval exegetical writings or, most interestingly, in interlinear or marginal glosses to Latin gospel harmonies with a 'Vulgatized' text type. That a thirteenth-century Dutch cleric should have consulted such glosses while translating a gospel harmony from Latin into the vernacular surely is more likely than that he possessed a now lost Old Latin Diatessaron transmitting second-century readings.²⁶

However, Joosten proceeds as if this has no bearing on his own textual analysis regarding the "*Gospel of Barnabas* and the Diatessaron". In a very similar way Joosten promises to present "variants exclusively attested in *Barnabas* and the Italian Harmonies", which are supposed to prove the relationship between the *Gospel of Barnabas* and the Italian (Venetian and Tuscan) Harmonies. Again, by using the word "exclusively" Joosten is laying quite a claim. On examination, his examples do not display this exclusive attestation. The first example is an addition to the text of Mt 6:24/Lk 16:13, according to Joosten attested solely in the *Gospel of Barnabas* and the Venetian Diatessaron ("without other textual support"):

Matthew 6:24/Luke 16:13: "No one can serve two masters"

Barnabas: "No one can in any wise serve two masters *that are at enmity one with the other*"

Venetian: "There is no one who can serve two masters *that are contrary to one another*"

²⁵ Cf. B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed., Oxford 1983, 46-66, M.T. Gibson, "The Place of the *Glossa Ordinaria* in Medieval Exegesis", in: *Ad litteram. Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, ed. M.D. Jordan und K. Emery, Jr., Notre Dame, IN 1992, 5-27.

²⁶ J. Joosten, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, 78.

Consultation of the *Glossa Ordinaria* could easily have explained the addition. The *Biblia cum glossa ordinaria*²⁷ we consulted reads:

Matthew 6:24: Nemo potest duobus dominis servire (no one can serve two masters), and over “dominis” (masters) gives the interlinear addition: “*inter se dissidentibus*” (*that are at enmity with each other*).

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the same interlinear gloss is also present in several of the glossed medieval Latin Gospel Harmony manuscripts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²⁸

Rather than being indicative of a unique agreement, this example highlights our point made earlier that the medieval gloss apparatuses are indeed important sources for some of the aberrant readings found in vernacular gospel harmonies (like the Venetian in this case). Moreover, it also is evident that the *Gospel of Barnabas* shares traditions of the same background. A source critical study of this renaissance text should certainly check the *Glossa Ordinaria* by default.

2.b. Syriacisms in Western Texts

One of the linguistic phenomena Joosten records is the presence of ‘Syriacisms’ in Western texts, most prominently in the Middle Dutch Liège *Life of Jesus*. He supposes that “the linguistic form of a [Syriac] text... [has] left traces in a translation [Liège *Life of Jesus*] of a translation [Old Latin Harmony], centuries removed from the original”. Joosten even distinguishes various types of Syriacisms in Western texts. “The most convincing cases” he considers those which can be explained from “the constraints of the Syriac language”. As an example he mentions Luke 2:47 where the Vulgate reads: “*super prudentia, et responsis eius*” ([astonished] at his understanding and his answers), but the Liège *Life of Jesus*: “*van sire wysheit ende van sinen antwerden*” (*at his wisdom and at his answers*). Where the Vulgate, and also the Greek Bible text, have a single preposition governing two co-ordinated nouns, the Middle Dutch Liège *Life of Jesus* repeats the preposition before the second noun. The Syriac version (sy^s) also repeats the preposition, which

²⁷⁾ *Biblia Sacra cum Glossa Ordinaria*, Antwerpen 1617, part V. Since there is no critical edition of the *Glossa Ordinaria* available, we had to use a printed edition of a Bible with the Gloss.

²⁸⁾ Cf. for example ms. *Oxford, Bodleian Library* 2761 (*Auct. D.1.8*), fol. 27v, ms. *London, British Library Royal 4 A. IV*, fol. 23v, and ms. *London, British Library Royal 3 B. VIII*, 15v.

can be explained from the fact that the Syriac language requires this syntactical feature. In a Middle Dutch text, however, Joosten considers such repetition of the preposition “unidiomatic”, and thus due to “Syriac influence”.²⁹ Unfortunately, he has not sufficiently taken into account the literary context of this very medieval Dutch text, as we will now demonstrate.

To begin with, Joosten could have taken the judgment of one of the authorities on medieval Dutch manuscripts and literature as a warning to tackle the business of medieval Dutch linguistics more seriously. In his *Middel nederlandse Handschriften uit Europese en Amerikaanse Bibliotheken*³⁰ Jean Deschamps already rejected the alleged Syriacisms in the Liège *Life of Jesus*, which were quoted by Daniël Plooi, ³¹ as normal Dutch expressions of 13th-century Brabant and Flanders.

Regarding the details, searches on individual prepositions in the electronic version of the *Corpus van Middelnederlandse teksten (tot en met het jaar 1300)* (the so-called *Corpus Gysseling*), which has been available from 1998,³² could have been performed. This corpus consists of all the known documentary and literary Dutch texts dating prior to the fourteenth century and gives sufficient empirical data to settle the case of prepositions governing two and more co-ordinate nouns for that period.³³ The result of such a search would have been that, contrary to what Joosten claims, the repetition of a preposition governing two or more co-ordinate nouns is a frequent feature of medieval Dutch. The preposition “op” (on), for example, is repeated with two co-ordinate nouns in 85% of the cases, so “*op xx ende op yy*” (*on xx and on yy*); the preposition “in” is repeated in as much as over 90% of the cases.³⁴

A similar analysis could have been performed on the alphabetic index of the *Corpus Gysseling*, in which every occurrence of a word is listed according

²⁹ J. Joosten, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, 83.

³⁰ 2nd edition, Leiden 1972, 145.

³¹ See D. Plooi, *A Further Study*, 45-71.

³² The printed version is known as *Corpus van Middelnederlandse teksten (tot en met het jaar 1300)*, ed. M. Gysseling, Series 1, 9 Vols: *ambtelijke bescheiden*; Series 2, 6 Vols, *literaire handschriften*, 's-Gravenhage 1977-1985. This corpus not only includes texts of various genres but also in various dialects.

³³ For the details we are indebted to K. Depuydt and J. de Does (INL/Institute for Dutch Lexicology) and K. van Dalen-Oskam (NIWI/Netherlands Institute for Scientific Information Services).

³⁴ Similarly high repetition rates are found for the preposition “met” (with), or for the three prepositions mentioned, in combinations with the conjunction “of” (or) instead of “ende” (and).

to the pertinent page and line numbers in the edition. Even a cursory look at the entries for prepositions confronts the reader with frequent instances where the same preposition is listed twice for the same line of text. More often than not this is indicative of a repetition of this preposition with two co-ordinate nouns. There are even examples of enumerations with more than two co-ordinate nouns, in which one is lacking its ‘proper’ preposition, but the missing preposition was added interlinearly.³⁵

Finally, even a close reading of the entire text of the Liège *Life of Jesus* should have prevented Joosten from making his judgement—if not with respect to medieval Dutch, then at least with regard to this particular text. He would have realized that the repetition of the preposition with two co-ordinate nouns is a feature frequently employed by the Dutch translators/editors/redactors of the Liège *Life of Jesus*. It is found in numerous places in the manuscript that have no relation to any Syriac text but reflect editorial matters such as the title, the prologue, and many expositions to the harmony text. The very title of the Liège *Life of Jesus* sets the tune regarding the repetition of the preposition with co-ordinate nouns:³⁶

ENE SCHONE HISTORIE VAN DEN WESENE ENDE VAN DEN LEUENE ONS HEREN
JHESU CHRISTI (DB, 1)
(A beautiful story of the existence and of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ)³⁷

In the prologue we find the following passages:

Ens tijds so bat mi een mijn lieue vrint, dat ic dewangelie trokke uten latine in did-
scher talen ende ic vten texte van den vire ewangelisten makde ene schone historie
van den wesene ende *van* den leuene ons Heren Ihesu Christi... (DB, 2, 2-5)³⁸

³⁵ *Corpus van Middelnederlandse teksten* (Series 1: *ambtelijke bescheiden*) 1/6, Alfabetical Index G-M, 4052-4079 references all the instances of the preposition “in” according to page and line numbers in 13th century documentary texts. Interlinear addition of the preposition “in” can be found in, e.g., *Corpus van Middelnederlandse teksten* (Series 1: *ambtelijke bescheiden*) 1/1, 24, line 29 (and note o): “bede in etene ende in dranken ende in cledern”, where the second “in” was added supralinearly.

³⁶ The following passages are given according to *Diatessaron Leodiense, Corpus Sacrae Scripturae Neerlandicae Medii Aevi*, Series Minor Tom. 1, Vol. 1, ed. C.C. de Bruin. Between brackets the pertinent pages and line numbers of this edition are given as DB, [page] x, [line(s)] y-z.

³⁷ The English translation was made by A.J. Barnouw and is found on the odd pages of the *Diatessaron Leodiense*.

³⁸ Once I was asked by a dear friend of mine that I should draw the Gospel out of Latin into the Dutch language, and that I should compose out of the text of the four evangelists a beautiful story of the existence and of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

... Ende hir omme, alsic te din steden come, so salic ochte *met* glosen ochte *met* expositien die donkerheit vercleren, so ic best ende cortelecst mach... (DB, 4, 6-8)³⁹

... Mar die alle goede werke volbrengt, hi mote dit oc also volbrengen te sinen loue, dat ter oc aldeghene af gebetert moten sijn diet *met* ghoeder willechheit ende *met* ghoeder ernstechheiden selen lesen ende ontfaen... (DB, 4, 19-22)⁴⁰

Typical examples of this linguistic phenomenon can be found in passages that have been added to the harmony text in the form of excursus, giving extra information on the biblical text:

... Sente IJan de ewangeliste, die onder de vire ewangelisten sonderlinghe ghelijct es den vligenden are, om dat hi hoger uloegh *met* kinnisse ende *met* uerstannissen in de ombegrijpleke heimlekheit der gotheit dan dandre daden, hi beghint sine ewangelie aldus... (DB, 4, 24-25)⁴¹

... Dit was Zacharias profetie die hi profeterde *van* onsen Here ende *van* sinen kinde sente IJanne... (DB, 12, 12-14)⁴²

... Sente Lucas dewangeliste makt oc ene historie *van* dergheborten Ihesu Christi ende *van* sinen gheslegte opwert clemmende, also also sente Matheus doet nederwert gaende... (DB, 14, 10-11)⁴³

... *met* idelre glorien ochte *met* andre quaden onreinecheiden besmet... (DB, 140, 8-11, marginal gloss)⁴⁴

Some such additions are explicitly indicated, e.g. as “continuatio”:

... Nu hebwi bescreuen den proces van der geborten Ihesu Christi. Nu selewi wider kiren ende seggen *van* den koningen diene besochten ende *van* der persecucien des conings Herodess (DB, 20, 6-7)⁴⁵

³⁹) And therefore, when I come to those places, I shall, either *with* glosses or *with* explanations, clear up the obscurity as well and as briefly as I can.

⁴⁰) But may he who accomplishes all good works accomplish this also to his praise, so that all those may be improved by it who shall read and receive it *with* good intention and *with* good earnest.

⁴¹) Saint John the Evangelist, who among the four evangelists is especially compared to the flying eagle, because he flew higher *with* knowledge and *with* understanding into the unfathomable mystery of the Godhead than did the others, (he) begins his gospel thus.

⁴²) This was Zacharias' prophecy which he prophesied *about* out Lord and *about* his child Saint John.

⁴³) Saint Luke the Evangelist also tells a story *of* the nativity of Jesus Christ and *of* his generation going upward even as does Saint Matthew going downward.

⁴⁴) ... *with* vain glory or *with* other evil impurities.

⁴⁵) Now we have described the story of the nativity of Jesus Christ. Now we shall go back and tell *of* the kings who visited him and *of* the persecution of king Herod.

... Nu late wi hir van din kinde, want in der ewangelien en vinde wi nemmeer ghescreuen *van* sire kinscheit noch *van* sinen wesene dis hi plach tote sinen dertech ijaren, ende seggen voert *van* sente Jjanne ende *van* din ghetuge dat hi onsen Here gaf (DB, 24, 19-22)⁴⁶

or as “*expositio*”:

... Dit profeterde Ysaiaes van hem, want die stat van Capharnaum si steet in den termten *van* Zabulon ende *van* Neptalim... (DB, 38, 16-18)⁴⁷

... Expositio Scandalizeren dats *met* warden ochte *met* werken den euenkersten oscun van valle gheuen... (DB, 130, 14-19, exposition in margin)⁴⁸

Sometimes these passages even mention their source (i.e. the gloss):

... Op dit wart segt de glose dat *bi* der stichtingen vander borgh ende *bi* den verweruene van der soenen es ons betekent dat vertijen, daer hi af segt dat wi alles om sinen wille vertijen moten... (DB, 84, 9-10)⁴⁹

The examples presented here should suffice to illustrate that the repetition of the preposition with two co-ordinate nouns is a feature frequently used by the translators/editors/redactors of the Liège *Life of Jesus* in clearly redactional passages. We should, therefore, not be surprised to find this feature in the Dutch translation of the Gospel (harmony) text as well. Thus, Joosten’s explanation of only that part of the evidence as Syriacisms is not only unnecessarily complicated but overlooks the contextual evidence.

3. How to Deal with the “Diatessaron Tradition”—Methodology Matters

In concluding our essay we want to sum up our critique of Joosten’s methodological procedures in analyzing the *Gospel of Barnabas* in combination with

⁴⁶ Now we leave off here [telling] about the child, for in the gospel we find nothing more written *of* his childhood, nor *of* the existence that he led until he was thirty years [old] and [we] tell on *about* Saint John, and *of* the testimony that he gave our Lord.

⁴⁷ This Isaiah prophesied concerning him; for the city of Capharnaum stands on the borders *of* Zabulon and *of* Neptalim.

⁴⁸ Offend, that is, *with* words or *with* deeds give occasion of falling to the fellow-christian.

⁴⁹ On this word says the gloss that *by* the building of the castle and *by* the obtaining of the reconciliation is signified to us that renunciation of which he says that we must renounce everything for his sake.

Western harmonistic sources. At the same time we attempt to transform our critique into a set of methodological principles that in our view should be adhered to when dealing with medieval western (mostly) vernacular sources as possible resources for ancient readings (e.g. of the Diatessaron).

Again, we would like to emphasize that our aim is not to discuss all the individual examples Joosten has brought forward in support of his theory. More fundamentally, we want to refute his method of comparing isolated readings from remote texts and its attendant serious flaws. In our assessment of Joosten's methodology as evidenced in his article "The *Gospel of Barnabas* and the Diatessaron" we have highlighted serious historical and philological weaknesses. His concentration on isolated readings stands in the way of an appropriate understanding of textual phenomena within their immediate historical and literary context. Joosten's explanation of the repetition of a preposition with two co-ordinate nouns in the medieval Dutch Liège Diatessaron as unidiomatic and "Syriacistic" disobeys basic rules of philological analysis. He ignores not only a well-documented feature of early medieval Dutch but also the prominence of this feature within the clearly redactional parts of the Liège Diatessaron itself. Joosten's preference for isolating Diatessaronic readings precludes his selection of source material for comparison. As a result he misses crucial evidence from the historical setting of western medieval texts. Study of the medieval exegetical tradition (as illustrated by our example from the *Glossa Ordinaria*) could have filled in that void. Finally, the model that Joosten uses to link his selection of source material is not fit for the purpose. The postulated Old Latin harmony, which is the backbone of his analysis, turns out to be both unnecessary and historically implausible. In our view it is important to note that Joosten's method—concentration on isolated readings and postulation of an Old Latin harmony—is a common approach in Diatessaronic research. Therefore, the mentioned shortcomings of this methodology affect Diatessaronic research of that type as a whole.

On the other hand we should like to emphasize the ongoing relevance of the quest for the Diatessaron. Efforts to reconstruct this lost late-second century text can be worthwhile and rewarding. However, before textual phenomena within a medieval harmony text can be used as a contribution to this reconstruction, appropriate methodological procedures have to be employed. In the analysis of medieval western vernacular harmony texts we would suggest answering at least the following questions:

Can textual phenomena displayed in the individual harmonies be explained

- 1) as part of the text in which they appear (as shown above)
 - a) idiolect features of the translator/redactor/copyist/etc.
 - b) linguistic phenomena in a certain period
- 2) as a result of the influence of texts closely related to the vernacular harmony
 - a) contemporary Latin and vernacular harmonies
 - b) related texts, such as Latin harmony commentaries, contemporary vernacular Bible translations
- 3) as a result of the influence of other contemporary texts, such as Bible commentaries, paraphrases, etc.

We are well aware of the fact that answering these questions calls for a lot of work. It not only requires a thorough analysis of the entire text of the vernacular harmonies but also of their medieval literary contexts. However, we believe that these questions need to be answered before certain textual phenomena in medieval vernacular harmonies can be used to reconstruct Tatian's lost Diatessaron—or for any other purpose.