

In response to the recent flurry of posts on the question of a “first-century Mark,” I have received a very interesting question: suppose there *were* a first-century Mark that was discovered (hey, it’s possible! And we’re holding our breaths - what an amazing find it would be).. Would there be a way of showing it was the actual original Mark, the one the author himself wrote with his own hand?

I was asked this question on the blog seven years ago, and responded to it by saying I had never thought about it before. (!) Below is the original question and my initial reflections. My views haven’t matured much during the past seven years (and they ain’t the only thing), so I give my initial response. If someone can improve on it, let me know.

First here is this week’s way of asking the question:

QUESTION:

Suppose someone did claim to have found the original.... I get that you can show something isn’t original, such as by dating it to two hundred years later. But is there anything you can do to show it is likely original?

Here now is the original post.

READER’S QUESTION:

Were we to have any *original manuscript* of any NT document in our midst, would we be able to recognize and confirm it as such? If so, how?

BART’S RESPONSE:

Now that’s a question I’ve never been asked before! And in fact, that I’ve never really thought about before. It’s been fun to reflect on it a bit.

To get to the short answer: I think the answer would almost certainly be “No”.

The reasons are of particular interest, though. Suppose by chance a very early copy of the Gospel of John appeared. How would we ...

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