

ARTICLE

Name Recall in the Synoptic Gospels

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Abstract

Onomastic congruence (a feature defined in this article) is characteristic of historiographic biographies from the Early Empire. The Synoptic Gospels display onomastic congruence, as well as conservatism in their treatment of names. The preservation of names, especially those centred around key roles and events, suggests that some names may have been preserved in the oral archives of early Christian communities to footnote living eyewitness sources, paralleling historiographical situations.

Keywords: eyewitnesses; Jesus; memory; onomastics; historiography; Richard Bauckham

1. Names and Memory

Personal names are difficult to learn and easy to forget compared to other biographical data.¹ Names of acquaintances, for example, are the most common types of words for a TOT (tip-of-the-tongue) experience, a memory retrieval failure during which a word cannot be remembered while its retrieval feels imminent.² Young, Hay, and Ellis studied diary entries of twenty-two people and confirmed that in everyday experiences an acquaintance's name is more difficult to recall than other personal details; furthermore, it is common to forget a person's name while remembering their occupation, but rare to forget their occupation while remembering their name.³ This tendency cannot be attributed to the relative frequency or phonological form of names, since the occupation 'baker' is consistently recalled better than the name 'Baker', a situation termed 'the baker paradox'.⁴ Memory is malleable and revolves around core concepts or narratives, around a 'gist' that restructures memories of smaller details, and this sheds light on why names are forgettable: they are generally arbitrary, difficult to image, and impossible to

¹ A. W. Young, C. H. Dennis, and A. W. Ellis, 'The Faces that Launched a Thousand Slips: Everyday Difficulties and Errors in Recognizing People', *British Journal of Psychology* 76 (1985) 495–523; G. Cohen, 'Why is it Difficult to Put Names to Faces?' *British Journal of Psychology* 81 (1990) 287–97; N. Stanhope and G. Cohen, 'Retrieval of Proper Names: Testing the Modes', *British Journal of Psychology* 84 (1993) 51–65; G. Cohen and D. M. Burke, 'Memory for Proper Names: A Review', *Memory* 1.4 (1993) 249–63. Accounts of extraordinary ancient memories often focus on names: e.g. Plato repeating 50 names after hearing them once (*Hi. Maior* 285e), Seneca the Elder's claim of recalling 2000 names read to him in his youth (*Contr.* 1 pref. 2).

² D. M. Burke, D. G. Mackay, J. S. Worthley, and E. Wade, 'On the Tip-of-the-tongue: What Causes Word Finding Failures in Young and Older Adults?', *Journal of Memory and Language* 30 (1991) 542–79.

³ Young, Dennis, and Ellis, 'Slips'; Cohen and Burke, 'Memory', 250.

⁴ Cohen, 'Names', 288; Stanhope and Cohen, 'Retrieval', 52.

systematise in the same way ‘baker’ or ‘German’ integrate into broader semantic networks.⁵ Names are often meaningless.

Even in traumatic memory, when recall is most vivid and enduring, names are the earliest casualties of memory loss.⁶ In ten vivid accounts of the 1944 massacre of Civitella, in which widows recollect the execution of every male from their village, only a few personal names are recalled.⁷ A case where Holocaust survivors were questioned in 1984 and 1987 also revealed that many details remained fixed when comparing these interviews to those from forty years prior, while names had largely been forgotten.⁸ T. M. Derico’s investigations of oral traditions in northern Jordan reveal a unique exception – a case where many personal names are recalled over a long period of time; we will return to this later.⁹ But if memory is generally frail and particularly so in name recall – i.e. if names are meaningless, arbitrary, and difficult to image – why do certain ancient works contain many authentic personal names?

This invites the further question of whether onomastics (the study of names) can be used as evidence to determine eyewitness source material in ancient texts, namely in the Gospels. Specifically, could this suggestion explain why the Gospels retain a significant quantity of appropriately distributed names corresponding at times, even orthographically, to common pronunciations? In support of this, Richard Bauckham observes that onomastics is seldom used and surprisingly little discussed in NT studies; the classicist Simon Hornblower calls it ‘deplorably under-utilized’ in assessing historiographical sources.¹⁰ This paper is a small step towards remedying this defect, but it also results from initial misgivings about Bauckham’s claims. First, Bauckham argues that the distribution of names in the Gospels is indicative of authenticity, because the relative frequencies of names in the Gospels reflect statistics within Tal Ilan’s *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity: Part 1: Palestine 330 BCE – 200 CE* (Ilan I).¹¹ Various elements of this invite scepticism.

First, a period of 530 years seems too broad to determine reflective patterns, and Ilan herself concedes that her lexicon does not present a ‘snapshot impression of an onomastic situation’.¹²

⁵ J. Redman, ‘How Accurate Are Eyewitnesses? Bauckham and the Eyewitnesses in the Light of Psychological Research’, *JBL* 129.1 (2010) 177–97; R. McIver, ‘Eyewitnesses as Guarantors of the Accuracy of the Gospel Traditions in the Light of Psychological Research’, *JBL* 131.3 (2012) 529–46; D. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010) 1–30; Cohen, ‘Names’, 289.

⁶ See L. van de Weghe, ‘The Cerebral Scars of Shipwreck’, *TynBul* 70.2 (2019) 205–20, esp. 206–8.

⁷ M. Assunta, W. Lammoni, C. Weisberg, and V. de Grazia, ‘The Witnesses of Civitella’, *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 3.2 (1991) 171–95; from a word count of approximately 12,300, only 23 persons are named while 81 are anonymous.

⁸ R. Volbert, ‘Aussagen über traumatische Erlebnisse’, *Forens Psychiatr Psychol Kriminol* 5 (2011) 18–31; W. Wagenaar and J. Groeneweg, ‘The Memory of Concentration Camp Survivors’, *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 4 (1990) 77–87.

⁹ T. M. Derico, *Oral Tradition and Synoptic Verbal Agreement: Evaluating the Empirical Evidence for Literary Dependence* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2016) 267–90. Derico provides transcripts from three interviews conducted in 2002–3: his subjects are disciples of Roy Whitman, founder of a small Jordanian evangelical community in the late 1920s. The first recounts 14 names (885 words total); the second, 4 names (2000 words); the third, 8 names (1900 words).

¹⁰ R. Bauckham, ‘The Eyewitnesses and the Gospel Traditions’, *JSHJ* 1.1 (2003) 28–60, at 60; R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017²) 67; S. Hornblower, ‘Personal Names and the Study of the Ancient Greek Historians’, in *Greek Personal Names: Their Value as Evidence* (ed. Simon Hornblower and Elaine Matthew; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 131.

¹¹ E.g. 15.6 per cent of males are named Joseph and Simon in general; 18.2 per cent of males are named Joseph and Simon in the Gospels-Acts (*Eyewitnesses*, 71–5, 84; T. Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity: Part 1: Palestine 330 BCE – 200 CE* (TSAJ), 91; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

¹² Ilan I, 50. Richard Bauckham is currently working on a new prosopography (50 BCE to 135 CE) with the aim of acquiring greater accuracy, correcting further errors discovered in Ilan I, and supplementing her data with new inscriptions being published by the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*.

Moreover, could fiction in historical guise not accomplish such reflective patterns? Michael Strickland underappreciates the onomastic data of the Gospels-Acts but succeeds in demonstrating that some onomastic verisimilitude can be accomplished, for example, in the *Protevangeliem of James*.¹³

Responding to Bauckham's call to dig deeper into onomastics, but also to an impulse to investigate his claims, I compiled my own list of named individuals from the Gospels-Acts, as well as from twenty-five non-canonical works of antiquity, which were firstly comparable in length to the Gospels-Acts, and secondly centred around one or two protagonists. This created comparable onomastic data from twenty-eight sources, placing the five New Testament narratives alongside Greek romances, Greco-Roman biographies, and apocryphal materials.

My findings establish that onomastic congruence (defined below) is characteristic of historiographic biographies from the Early Empire, strengthening Bauckham's claims. Further, the Synoptic Gospels display onomastic congruence, as well as conservatism in their treatment of names.

2. Onomastic Congruence

'Onomastic congruence' refers to the creation of naming patterns by an ancient author that appropriately reflect the data of relevant prosopographies. The modern researcher observes it in the convergence of three factors: 1) a relatively significant number of appropriate proper names; 2) a relatively increased level of detail in proper names;¹⁴ 3) patterns of proper names reflecting 'the situation on the ground'. Seldom will a non-historiographical work surveyed in our study contain any one of these three features; it never contains all three. This is significant. Although it is an unconscious act by the ancient author, onomastic congruence results from a conscious historiographical impulse at some level; it is not achieved otherwise. The reasons for this are discussed below.

3. Relevant Prosopographies

This study refers to lexicons which, like telephone books, include lists of names but also lists of people bearing each name, often with relevant biographical details. They are onomastics in the former sense and prosopographies in the latter, but for our interests I simply refer to them as 'prosopographies'.¹⁵

Five are referenced:

- The *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* (LGPN), now published in five volumes, catalogues approximately 36,000 Greek names from 345,000 ancient people along the northern Mediterranean.¹⁶ A sixth volume to include Palestine is forthcoming. Published volumes can be searched digitally.

¹³ M. Strickland, 'What's in a Name? Richard Bauckham, First-Century Palestinian Jewish Names, and the Proteoangelium of James', *ATI* 7 (2014) 35–42. Strickland argues that, like the Gospels-Acts, the *Protevangeliem of James* contains first-century Jewish Palestinian names without being authentic, yet he fails to appreciate relative distribution and the qualification of popular names.

¹⁴ Typically, you need around forty names to determine patterns that can be compared with data from prosopographies, and ideally some of these names will involve qualifiers. Beyond this, several other factors impact on the ability to draw comparisons: Greek names, for example, are much more varied than Roman and especially Jewish names, meaning that you need fewer names to determine patterns for the latter. On the other hand, more detail about naming trends is often available from volumes of the LGPN which can influence the ability to draw favourable comparisons in the case of Greek names from certain provinces.

¹⁵ Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 67–8; Ilan I, 1.

¹⁶ P. M. Fraser and E. Matthews (ed.), *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* (5 Vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1987–2014).

- The *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* (PIR) covers 15,000 elite people living in the Roman Empire from 31 BCE to 305 CE.¹⁷ It is digitised by the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie Der Wissenschaften.
- The *Digital Prosopography of the Roman Republic* (DPRR) catalogues 4800 elite members of the Roman Republic from 509 BCE to 31 BCE.¹⁸ It is digitised by King's College, London.
- The *Trismegistos People* database can also be searched digitally; it contains 33,900 names of 368,000 ancient people living in Egypt and is based on the *Prosopographia Ptolemaica* (ProsPtol).¹⁹
- The last prosopography is Ilan I, covering 2953 occurrences of 521 names and available only in hard copy.²⁰ I will narrow her list down to an onomastic snapshot of Jesus' Palestinian environment (30 BCE –90 CE). This timeframe generally captures people living circa 30 CE. Life expectancy was in the mid-twenties in first-century Galilee, but only fifty per cent lived to the age of five; after this, attrition rates level, with only ten per cent living beyond sixty.²¹

4. Patterns

Relevant prosopographies can be used to assess the authenticity of onomastic data in texts, although an appreciation for general patterns is vital for sound conclusions. David Gill's analysis of the name Δάμαρις in Acts 17.34, for example, is a good illustration of an unsound conclusion in this regard.²² He argues that Δάμαρις is likely an invention by the author, partly because it is a singly-attested Greek name.²³ Several errors undermine this reasoning. First, the philologist Sterling Dow observes that one in twenty-five ancient Greek names is unique; Acts 16–28 contains nineteen Greek names, two of which are unique (Δάμαρις, 17.14; Λυδία 16.14), conforming to the general pattern.²⁴ Interestingly, Ἀπολλῶς, mentioned in Acts 18.24, is also rarely attested in the LGPN because it is not a Greek name; it is Egyptian (attested widely in ProsPtol), where Ἀπολλῶς is said to originate from according to the author of Acts.

Gill's error is deepened by actual statistics now provided in LGPN 5a and 5b, which place rarity of Greek names in Coastal Asia at nine to ten per cent rather than Dow's four per cent, making Acts resemble the onomastic situation on the ground more precisely.²⁵ Acts 17.34 also contains another name – Διονύσιος – one of the most popular names. Διονύσιος is

¹⁷ *Prosopographia Imperii Romani Saec I, II, III. Partim consilio et auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Regiae Borussicae editum. Partim consilio et auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Rei Publicae Democraticae Germanicae editum. Editio altera* (Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter, n.d.).

¹⁸ T. Broughton and S. Robert, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic* (New York: American Philological Association, 1951); J. Rüpke, *Fasti Sacerdotum. A Prosopography of Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Religious Officials in the City of Rome, 300 BC to AD 499*, (trans. David M. B. Richardson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and K. Zmeskal, *Adfinitas: Die Verwandtschaften der senatorischen Führungsschicht der römischen Republik von 218–31 v. Chr.*, (ed. Armin Eich; Passau: Stutz, 2009) provide the backbone for the database. Our analysis would be skewed by the fact that the PIR and DPRR only focus on elite people, if it were not for the fact that the works analysed with respect to these databases also have the same focus.

¹⁹ W. Peremans, E. Dack, *Prosopographia Ptolemaica* (10 Vols.; Leuven: Bibliotheca Universitatis, 1950–2002).

²⁰ This covers only statistically valid entries, following Bauckham's meticulous analysis (*Eyewitnesses*, 69–71).

²¹ J. L. Reed, 'Instability in Jesus' Galilee: A Demographic Perspective', *JBL* 129.2 (2010) 343–365, esp. 348, 353–54; R. McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and the Synoptic Gospels* (Atlanta: SBL, 2011) 189–209.

²² D. Gill, 'Dionysios and Damaris: A Note on Acts 17.34', *CBQ* 61.3 (1999) 483–490.

²³ Gill writes, 'there is no reason to believe Luke did not invent the name [emphasis his]' ('Dionysios and Damaris', 487), although Damaris is attested twice elsewhere (V3a-9097, V1-52829).

²⁴ S. Dow, 'Lakhares, a Rare Athenian Name', *Classical Philology* 52.2 (1957) 106–7. Another name in Acts 16–28, Ἐραστός, is uncommon but not rare (44 attestations in LGPN 1–5); others are more typical Greek names.

²⁵ Statistics from LGPN V5a, xvi: 51,293 total attestations, 4386 names singly attested; from LGPN V5b, xxx–xxxii: 44,748 total attestations, 4775 names singly attested.

qualified ('member of the Areopagus') while Δάμορις, a rare name, is not.²⁶ Acts 16–20 also contains three theophoric names: Τιμόθεος (16.1), Δημήτριος (19.24), and Διονύσιος (17.34). This makes three out of nineteen (15.8 per cent) theophoric, also resembling a typical onomastic situation along the ancient northern Mediterranean.²⁷ Although this article will focus mainly on the relative usages of common names to determine onomastic congruence, in this case Acts also demonstrates onomastic congruence through its statistically appropriate usages of rare Greek names.

5. Naming Practices

Naming conventions among ancient women differed from those among men. During the Roman Republic, women were generally deprived of a personal name; in ancient Athens it was against etiquette to mention a woman's name in oratory, and she was typically referred to only in relationship to a named father, husband, etc.²⁸ All female Latin names in *Ilan I* are derived from male names, with the simple addition of a female suffix (a). To give a sense of the disproportionate attention given to male names, it is worth noting that among the 2826 named persons in *Ilan I* (both fictional and non-fictional), only 317 are women: i.e. 11.2%.²⁹ Such androcentrism is pervasive, and therefore the naming practices of males – and often, of elite males – provide the broadest data for statistical analysis, and our study interacts primarily with them only due to their statistical prominence in both the relevant narratives and prosopographies. Ancient Greek and Jewish males were typically given one name. This name was qualified most frequently by the patronym in the genitive case, where υἱός is sometimes supplied: Σώπατρος Πύρρου (Acts 20.4), Φεΐδωνος υἱός Στρεψιάδης (Aristoph. *Nub.* 1.134).³⁰ The primary name could also be qualified by deme (Ἀριστάρχου Μακεδόνας Θεσσαλονικέως, Acts 27.2), by nickname (Σίμωνος τοῦ λεπροῦ, Mark 14.3), or by other means.³¹

The Roman naming system among elite males is comparatively complex. They typically had three names: the *tria nomina*. The first, the *praenomen*, was a personal name bestowed at birth; during the Republic ninety-nine per cent of males shared only seventeen *praenomina*.³² Due to this shared commonality, *praenomina* were eclipsed in public usage by the second name: the *nomen*.³³ Since the *nomen* was the family or clan name, males were individuated by their *praenomen* within the household but publicly by their *nomen*.

Greeks struggled to assimilate this practice, however, and might refer to a public individual by the *praenomen* (e.g. to T. Quinctius Flaminius as 'Titus'). Due to the limitations of the *praenomen*, the *cognomen* – a third name – emerged as a popular alternative to qualify the *nomen*.³⁴ Since the *cognomen* was another personal name but far more versatile and

²⁶ I prefer 'qualified' to 'disambiguated' since names are not necessarily qualified for the purpose of disambiguation, and for this reason, it is the least reliable criterion for assessing onomastic congruence; nevertheless, even Hornblower deems a high concentration of appropriate patronymics relevant to the discussion of eyewitness source material (*Personal Names*, 140). Also see the discussion below on onomastic patterns in Suetonius' *Divus Julius*.

²⁷ E.g. LGPN 5b, Table 1.

²⁸ D. Schaps, 'The Woman Least Mentioned: Etiquette and Women's Names', *ClassQ* 27.2 (2009) 323–330, esp. 330.

²⁹ *Ilan I*, 3, 11.

³⁰ M. Keurentjes, 'The Greek Patronymics in -(ι)δας / -(ι)δης', *Mnemosyne* 50.4 (1997) 385–400, esp. 386.

³¹ The patronym can also serve as nickname (*Ilan I*, 18), a phenomenon supported by NT transliterations (cf. Σίμων Βαριωνᾶ, Matt. 16.16). For thorough treatments: *Ilan I*, 32–4; Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 83–4.

³² B. Salway, 'What's in a Name? A Survey of Roman Onomastic Practice from c. 700 B.C. to A.D. 700', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994) 124–45, esp. 125.

³³ Salway, 'What's in a Name?', 125.

³⁴ Salway, 'What's in a Name?', 126.

well-suited, the *nomen* and *cognomen* together become the most common occurrence of named people, for example, in Tacitus. *Praenomina* were simply abbreviated or excluded in Roman literature, therefore the *cognomen* and *nomen* are the most relevant for determining onomastic patterns.³⁵

6. Onomastic Congruence in Comparative Sources

Statistics on the usage of personal names within a composition cannot be acquired through systematic computer analysis; rather, each name must be catalogued while combing through each work individually. Unintentional errors in counting are unavoidable. Michael Strickland, for example, highlights Bauckham's error in ascribing the name 'Eros' to four people in the Gospels-Acts, although Bauckham here is clearly incorrect; Bauckham did not correct this for his second edition.³⁶ Such a blunder, in my estimation, is not a reflection of Dr Bauckham's scholarly care (or lack thereof), and he likely remained unaware of the error; this example only serves to reflect the tedious, challenging process previously described.

The project is further complicated by other considerations: do we include nicknames? demes? patronyms? In my case, I have opted to include names that seemed standardised to the extent that they could stand alone.³⁷ Of course, this process involves subjectivity. Nevertheless, I am confident that the broad patterns of data that these statistics represent will not be changed by minor errors or variations in counting. Onomastic analysis of twenty-three extrabiblical compositions reveals that onomastic congruence is only found in certain biographies from the Early Empire.³⁸

6.1 Apocryphal Gospels

The apocryphal gospels are the least persuasive in terms of onomastic congruence. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas has eight names, with Thomas the Israelite (Θωμᾶς Ἰσραηλίτης) as the only qualified name; aside from this unnatural qualification, a Palestinian Jewish boy is named Ζήνων, a name quite common in Delos and Athens but unusual for a Palestinian Jewish child.³⁹ The Gospels of Peter, Mary, and the Infancy Gospel of James have no qualified names and average less than ten names per work. The Gospel of Nicodemus is the most robust with forty-six names, nine of which are qualified. However, these belong to public figures contemporaneous to the author or known from the NT. One notable exception occurs in the prologue, missing in some MSS: Joseph Caiaphas. This first name is accurate and found nowhere in the canonical literature. Other names are positively incongruous: six of twenty-two allegedly Jewish names are unattested in Ilan I (Σήμις, Δαθαῆς, Νεφθαλεῖμ, 1.1; Ἀντώνιος, Ἀστέριος, Ἀμνής, 2.4). Regarding the names of the two thieves crucified beside Jesus (Δυσμᾶς and Γέστας, 9.5); Ilan regards the former 'without plausible explanation' and the latter 'obviously a literary invention'.⁴⁰

³⁵ Salway, 'What's in a Name?', 130.

³⁶ Strickland, 'What's in a Name?' p. 36; cf. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 88 (1st ed.); in the second edition, the error occurs again in Table 6 on p. 84.

³⁷ I would classify the name which qualifies Simon of the Gospels (Peter/Petra - 'the rock') as a standardised nickname, while discounting the qualifier attached to Barsabas Justus in the Acts of Paul ('of the Broad Feet').

³⁸ Regarding any of the texts discussed, tables of named persons, anonymous persons, toponyms, and their in-text references are available upon request.

³⁹ This point can be overemphasised, since Jewish persons bearing this theophoric name are attested in Palestine, albeit rarely and after 70 CE (e.g. Ilan I, 281; CIIP III 2179; CIIP IV 3484).

⁴⁰ Ilan I, 432-3.

6.2 Apocryphal Acts

The apocryphal Acts achieve more complex naming patterns, yet these too lack onomastic congruence. Although several names are qualified, there is no relationship between commonality of names and the presence of qualifiers. To illustrate, Barsabas Justus of the Broad Feet, Orion the Cappadocian, and Festus the Galatian – ‘Caesar’s chief men’ – are qualified in the Acts of Paul (10.2); Βαρσαβᾶς, however, is a Jewish name unattested in Roman prosopography while Ὠρίων and Φῆστος, allegedly Greek, are very rare in the LGPN I-V (twelve and four attestations respectively, with zero attestations in either Cappadocia or Galatia).⁴¹ Secondly, there is an unusually high percentage of rare Greek names; for example, the Acts of John has three rare Greek names – Κλέοβις, some MSS Κλέοβιος; Δρουσιανή; Ἀριστοβούλα – out of a total of only twelve.⁴² Lastly, the Acts of Peter (2.26–33) names Agrippa as prefect in Rome, while no urban prefect ever bore the name of the familiar Judean client king;⁴³ this Agrippa allegedly has four concubines – Ἀγριππίνα, Νικαρία (only attested as a Greek island), Εὐφημία, and Δόρις – the latter three Greek names almost completely unattested.

6.3 Novels

Extant ancient romances, including Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe*, Chariton’s *Callirrhoe*, Achilles Tatius’ *Clitophon and Leucippe*, and Heliodorus of Emesa’s *Aethiopia*, anticipate the modern historical novel. *Daphnis and Chloe* contains twenty-six names, none of which are qualified and many of which are rarely attested in the LGPN I–V;⁴⁴ further, none but two are attested in Lesbos, where the story takes place.⁴⁵ *Callirrhoe* has twenty-seven names. Six are qualified by deme, but there is no apparent relationship between the qualification of the name, its local setting, or its popularity; it appears to be a random feature of the text.⁴⁶ *Clitophon and Leucippe* contains twenty-seven names, seven of which (twenty-six per cent) are extremely rare, and it introduces several Egyptian persons with names more prominent in the LGPN I–V than in ProsPtol.⁴⁷ This situation is worsened in *Aethiopia*, where three of its twenty-one names are supposedly Egyptian (Ὀρουνδάτης, *Aeth.* 2.24; Μιτράνης, 2.24; Χαλάσιρις, 2.35), but are unattested in either ProsPtol or the LGPN I–V. Although historical novels can succeed in planting traces of verisimilitude, of ‘generic markers of factuality’, they fail to achieve onomastic congruence. Onomastic congruence seems to be an ‘intensely

⁴¹ The context indicates that Barsabas Justus was an esteemed soldier under Nero’s command; the possibility of a Jewish Roman soldier cannot be ruled out but, in any case, it is likely that the unique combination of names derives from the Barsabas Justus of Acts 1.23.

⁴² The only reference to Kleobis (Cleobis) in the LGPN is to the name in Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.31 (LPGN ID: V3a-17231).

⁴³ This may be a conflation with M. Vipsanius Agrippa.

⁴⁴ Number of attestations in the LGPN I–V: Δάμων, *Daphn.* 1.1 (0); Φιλητάς, 2.3 (1); Χρόμις, 3.15 (0); Διονύφανης, 4.13 (0); Νόπη, 1.6, only attested elsewhere as a Roman name (*Erig. Rom. di Canosa Add.* 21).

⁴⁵ Two exceptions: Χλόη, *Daphn.* 1.6 (also attested in Charitonides, *Synpl.* 37); Μεγάκλης, 4.35 (attested in the 7th century BCE, *Arist.* 1311 b, 27).

⁴⁶ E.g. Μένων has 275 attestations in the LGPN I–V, but none are attested in the given deme (Messene, *Chaer.* 1.7). Attestations from Lydia in LGPN V5a amount to 11,272, but the name Φαρνάκης – allegedly from Lydia (*Chaer.* 4.1) – is unattested there; the rare names Ζηνοφάνης and Μιθριδάτης are qualified (1.7, 3.7), while Διονύσιος, a very common name, is not (1.12).

⁴⁷ E.g. there are five times more attestations of Χαρμίδης (*Leuc. Clit.* 4.2.1) in the LGPN I–V than in ProsPtol, and also more attestations of Μενέλαος (2.33.1), although this comparison is less significant. Number of attestations in the LGPN I–V: Καλλιγόνη, 1.3.1 (2); Λευκίπη, 1.3.6 (3); Κλειοί, 1.16.1 (0); Ζήνωνι, 2.17.2 (0); Κώνωψ, 2.20.1 (3); Γοργία, 4.15.1 (2). Μελανθώ, 6.1.2 (4).

(even boringly) realistic' feature of a text which makes it 'difficult to sustain the classification [of fiction]'.⁴⁸

In *Cyropaedia* it is impossible to draw conclusions about onomastic congruence, since no two persons share a common name, and the only qualified names belong to public royal figures or military leaders.⁴⁹ In other words, there are no patterns of a 'situation on the ground'. *Life of Apollonius*, a composition on the verge of novel and βίος, and the *Alexander Romance* contain impressively complex naming patterns, although they are positively incongruent in several respects. Sometimes place names and personal names are conflated, historical figures are confused, and whole lists of names are elsewhere unattested.⁵⁰ *Alex.* 2.14.1 contains a list of eight members of Alexander the Great's court with names belonging to no historical persons throughout the age of Alexander; Krzysztof Nawotka comments, 'there are most probably no historical characters referred to here'.⁵¹ *Vita Apoll.* 6.1–10 lists a cluster of apparently Egyptian persons, but the majority are consistently common in the LGPN and consistently rare in ProsPtol.⁵²

6.4 Biographies

Surprisingly, many βίοι also lack onomastic congruence. Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Pythagoras*, for example, does not contain enough onomastic data to be determinative. With only twenty names, neither is the Gospel of John. The Gospel of Matthew only contains onomastic congruence due to material taken over from Mark – an issue we discuss later. *Agesilaus*, like John, contains too few names (only eighteen) to be determinative.

A lack of onomastic congruence, not only in the case of the Fourth Gospel and *Agesilaus*, but also in the case of double tradition and M material, cannot be used to render a negative verdict on their authenticity. A lack of determinative patterns in the Fourth Gospel and *Agesilaus*, for example, could result from the personal nature of these works (i.e. from a lack of a reliance on named sources); further dependence on a tradition that is less narratively focused could lead to fewer names being incorporated. Certainly, the case against a composition's authenticity is increased when naming patterns are demonstrated to be positively incongruous (as with the apocryphal material discussed above), but the criterion of onomastic congruence is only relevant for the compositions that contain it. In other words, onomastic congruence positively reflects a historiographical interest (more on this below), but a lack of onomastic congruence does not disprove it.

⁴⁸ L. Alexander, 'Fact, Fiction and the Genre of Acts', *NTS* 44.3 (1998) 380–399, esp. 391, 396.

⁴⁹ The ten qualified names: Cyrus, the Persian (1.1.3); Croesus, the king of Lydia (2.1.5); Artacamus, the king of Greater Phrygia (2.1.5); Aribaeus, the king of Cappadocia (2.1.5); the Arabian, Aragus (2.1.5); Gadatas, the castrated prince (5.3.10); Andamyas, the Mede (5.3.38); Rhambacas, the Mede (5.3.42); Abradatas, the king of Susa (6.3.35); Pheraulas, the Persian (8.3.2).

⁵⁰ Cf. *Vita Apoll.* 2.20, 'Porus'; C. P. Jones, 'Apollonius of Tyana's Passage to India', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 42.2 (2001) 185–199, esp. 192, 197; K. Nawotka, *The Alexander Romance by Ps.-Callisthenes: A Historical Commentary* (Netherlands, Brill: 2017) 169–83.

⁵¹ Nawotka, *Commentary*, 173.

⁵² Τιμασίων, 'an Egyptian from Naucratis', has twenty results in the LGPN I–V, with greatest concentrations in Athens, Issa, and Hyettos, but it is attested only singly in Egypt (I. Memnonion 245, 1); Θρασύβουλος, 'a native of Naucratis', is attested only twice in Egypt (P. Oxy. 12 1479, Ro 2; I. Hermoupolis 8, 3) in Hermopolis and Alexandria respectively, but over a hundred times in the LGPN I–V, with concentrations around Athens and Priene; Φυλίσκος is attested over 300 times in the LGPN I–V but half as much in ProsPtol; Νείλος is nowhere attested in Egypt but over thirty times around the Northern Mediterranean; Στρατοκλῆς, 'from Pharos', is attested 159 times in the LGPN I–V but under twenty times in ProsPtol; Θεσπεσιών is nowhere attested.

Demonax recounts twenty-eight names and qualifies only seven; each qualified name is relatively popular and hence appropriate for qualification in a local setting, but beyond this no further patterns can be determined.⁵³

About half of the fifty people in *Agricola* have single names, while the rest are listed by their nomen and cognomen together.⁵⁴ *Agricola* contains onomastic congruence on two layers, although somewhat superficially; first, single names are generally rarer than qualified names, which is a natural pattern; second, three of the two common names in *Agricola* – Julius (4x) and Caesar (2x) – are also commonly attested in the PIR; yet Nerva, attested twice in *Agricola*, is very uncommon.⁵⁵

Josephus' *Vita* has strong onomastic congruence. It names ninety-three Jewish people (109 in total), many of whom share common names: Simon (6x), Matthias (3x), Jonathan (4x), Joseph (2x), Julius (2x), Herod (4x), Agrippa (3x), John (2x), Jesus (6x), Levi (3x), Philip (2x), Ananias (2x), Justus (4x), Crispus (2x), Capellus (2x), and James (2x). Josephus qualifies all but eighteen names, most of which are comparatively rare and would need no qualification.⁵⁶ Furthermore, percentages of named people coincide well with Ilan I; a random sampling of popular names in *Vita*, for instance – Simon, Matthias, Jonathan, and Jesus – amounts to 20.4% of named Jewish people in *Vita* versus 16% in Ilan I.⁵⁷

Plutarch's *Caesar* contains 127 named people, thirty-one qualified names and seven common names. If we focus on names in the DPRR from 110 BCE – 40 BCE to create an onomastic snapshot, we discover that common names from the DPRR are typically qualified in *Caesar*, and that percentages of common names loosely reflect the DPRR (especially for *nomina*, e.g., Cornelius – 3.6% of named people in *Caesar* versus 2.4% in the DPRR). Yet there are exceptions: Publius and Marcus, for example, amount to 1.6% and 2.4% of names in *Caesar* respectively, while they account for 7.7% and 11.5% of *praenomina* in the DPRR.⁵⁸

Suetonius' *Divus Julius*, like Josephus' *Vita*, contains strong onomastic congruence. It names 144 people, qualifies 116 names, and contains fifteen common names. The twenty-eight unqualified names are relatively rare, and distributions of common *nomina* and *cognomina* – even *praenomina* – all generally reflect percentages in the DPRR.⁵⁹ Plutarch's most ambitious and informative biography, *Pompey*, also contains the most

⁵³ Qualified names: Sostratus the Boeotian; Timocrates of Heraclea; Python, son of some Macedonian; Peregrine Proteus; Agathocles the Peripatetic; Cyprian Rufinus; Herminus the Aristotelian (*Demonax*, 1, 3, 15, 21, 29, 54, 56).

⁵⁴ Despite its focus on the Roman conquest of Britain, only a few named persons are Britons (e.g., Cogidumnus, 14.1; Boudicea, 16.1; Galgacus, 29.4).

⁵⁵ Iulius has 671 attestations in the PIR, 4 in *Agr.*; Caesar has 66 attestations in the PIR, 2 in *Agr.*; Nerva also has 13 attestations in the PIR, 2 in *Agr.*

⁵⁶ E.g. Βόωνους (*Vita* 11) has a single attestation in Ilan I, p. 81; Ἀλιτύρος (16) is unattested; Πιστός (34) is singly attested in Ilan I, p. 303; Γόζορος (197) is unattested; Σακχάσιος (239) is only attested in *Vita* with this spelling, but likely derived from Zechariah (cf. Ilan I, p. 90); there are, however, exceptions (e.g. James and Ananias in *Vita* 96, p. 290).

⁵⁷ Based on Table 7 from Ilan I, p. 56.

⁵⁸ Publius has 267 (*nomina* 4, *praenomina* 263) attestations in the DPRR from a total of 3478 persons; Publius is attested twice from 127 people in *Caesar*, i.e. 1.6% vs 7.7%. Marcus (*praenomen*) has 401 of 3478 vs 3 of 127, i.e. 11.5% vs 2.4%. Cornelius (*nomen*) has 127 of 3478 vs 3 of 127, i.e. 3.6% vs 2.4%.

⁵⁹ A sampling of the rarity of unqualified names in *Jul.*: Plotius, 5 attestations in DPRR; Lepidus, 22; Sertorius, 1; Cicero, 8; Axius, 3; Catilina, 2; Vettius, 11; Cato, 10; Scipio, 14; Naso, 9; Curio, 5; Hertius, 2. On common names: Caesar (*cognomen*) has 18 attestations of 3478 persons in the DPRR vs 3 of 144 in *Jul.*, i.e. .5% vs 2%. Silanes (*cognomen*) has 11 of 3478 vs 2 of 144, i.e. 3% vs 1.4%. Aemilius (*nomen*) has 38 of 3478 vs 2 of 144, i.e. 1% vs 1.4%. Marcus (*praenomen*) has 400 of 3478 vs 11 of 144, i.e. 11.5% vs 7.6%. Lepidus (*cognomen*) has 22 of 3478 vs 2 of 144, i.e. 6% vs 1.4%. Cornelius (*nomen*) has 127 of 3478 vs 5 of 144, i.e. 3.6% vs 3.5%. Lucius (*praenomen*) has 517 of 3478 vs 6 of 144, i.e. 14.8% vs 4.2%. Quintus (*praenomen*) has 269 of 3478 vs 7 of 144, i.e. 7.7% vs 4.9%.

extensive onomastic data and congruence from the sources surveyed. It records 172 proper names (twenty-three non-Roman), twenty-seven qualified names, and six common names, while containing several layers of reflective onomastic patterns.⁶⁰ In our survey of twenty-five sources, the only works that bear onomastic congruence are those which Craig Keener suggests mark the height of historical sensitivity for the genre of the Greco-Roman βίος, and, especially in Plutarch, the apex of this genre within the Early Empire, when expectations of historical reliability were at their highest.⁶¹ Onomastic congruence appears to be a byproduct, however unintentional, of the information-driven nature of these historiographical works. Before revisiting this, it is helpful to appreciate that onomastic trends in the Synoptic Gospels are congruent and conservative in every accessible layer.

7. Onomastic Congruence in the Gospels

Onomastic trends in the Gospels are discussed by Richard Bauckham in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*. Bauckham first refines Ilan I to exclude fictional names and then compares the Gospels-Acts to the revised data. He highlights at least five examples of onomastic congruence. Firstly, popular names are generally and appropriately qualified. Secondly, Simon and Joseph are the top two male names in the Gospels-Acts and also in Ilan I. Thirdly, these two names are given to 18.2% of males in the NT narratives and to 15.6% of males in Ilan I. Fourthly, the names ‘Mary’ or ‘Salome’ apply to 38.9% of women in the Gospels-Acts; in Ilan I, the names apply to 28.6% of women.⁶² Bauckham further observes that 41.5% of Jewish men in the general population, according to Ilan I, bear one of the nine most popular male names, whereas 40.3% do so in the Gospels-Acts.⁶³

This last observation appears quite arbitrary. Why consider the top nine names? Would choosing another arbitrary number perhaps produce a less compelling result instead? A more concerning issue is that Bauckham’s maths does not seem to be correct. The top nine male names, according to his own tally of Ilan’s numbers,⁶⁴ are given to a total of 1227 males (Simon, 243; Joseph, 218; Eleazar, 166; Judah, 164; Yohanan, 122; Joshua, 99; Hananiah, 82; Jonathan, 71; Mattathias, 62 = 1227). Bauckham himself notes, at the bottom of this very table, that the total number of named males counted by Ilan is 2625. But 1227 is not 41.5% of 2625; it is 46.7%. That these same nine names are held by thirty-two Jewish males in the Gospels and Acts, which amounts to 40.5% of persons (contra Bauckham’s 40.3%), now seems slightly less impressive, but none of this compromises his main point. In fact, let us now take a different arbitrary number: the top six. According to Bauckham’s rendering of Ilan I, 1012 males bear these six names: 38.6%. What percentage of males in the Gospels and Acts bear these same names? 34.2% (27 males), which is quite proximate.

Ilan’s statistics are refined below to include only named historical Jewish males specifically datable to a range of 30 BCE – 90 CE; many possible first-century names are excluded

⁶⁰ *Pompey* contains reflective patterns similar to *Caesar* and *Julius Divus*. A sampling of qualified and unqualified names, however, further demonstrates how common names are generally qualified in *Pompey* while rarer names are not: the first seven qualified names, for example, are: Philippus (11 attestations in DPRR); Terentius (30); Valerius (46); Aurelius (28); Octavius (33); Calvinus (7); and Lentulus (35). The first seven unqualified names are: Cinna (8); Antistius (14); Carbo (10); Sulla (11); Vedius (1); Carrinas (3); Cloelius (4).

⁶¹ C. Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019) 15–18, 33–34, 68, 79–94, 150.

⁶² Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 71–2.

⁶³ Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 71–72.

⁶⁴ See Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 84.

from my statistics since ostraca, ossuaries, and papyri fragments often cannot be dated narrowly, but a combination of datable names from literature, papyri fragments, and inscriptions result in a sampling of 391 male names.⁶⁵ Unlike Bauckham, I exclude persons only named in the NT narratives to ensure that the statistics are not skewed in favour of biblical texts. Our small sampling does not aim to be fully representative, meaning that an entirely independent sample to that of the Gospels is best suited for comparative purposes. The data of the top twelve names is presented in [Table 1](#) in five columns.

The first column details Ilan's comprehensive list (based on Bauckham's adjustments); the second column details all datable male names from 30 BCE – 90 CE; the third details Bauckham's calculations of names in the Gospels-Acts; and the fourth and fifth columns reflect my calculations of Luke-Acts and Mark respectively (Matthew is not included because it retains many names from Mark but adds no new names – see discussion below). The comparison of Ilan's comprehensive list (column 1) to datable names from 30 BCE – 90 CE (column 2) demonstrates that an onomastic snapshot of Jesus' Palestine increases several elements of onomastic congruence in the Gospels-Acts. Several names in column 1 (Manaen and Honi), which rank in the top 12 of Ilan's exhaustive list, are missing from the top names in the Gospels-Acts (column 3), but they are also missing from top datable references in Jesus' time (column 2). Alternatively, several names (Alexander and Agrippa), which are missing from Ilan's top 12 list (column 1) but attested in the top names from 30 BCE – 90 CE (column 2), are also found in the Gospels-Acts (column 3).

Despite the small data sample, percentages of column 2 continue to be congruent with column 3, although certain percentages are adversely affected (esp. for Simon, Joseph, and Judas). Columns 4 and 5 demonstrate that onomastic congruence exists in Luke-Acts independently, and to a lesser extent in Mark. This is partly due to the larger amount of text in Luke-Acts, although a significant amount of the Acts' narrative involves a Hellenistic environment; nevertheless, length is certainly a factor. Regardless, this contradicts the claim that congruent-naming patterns only prevail when the Gospels are considered together. The Synoptic Gospels contain congruence independently, while John adds minor weight to the overall data.⁶⁶

8. Onomastic Conservatism in the Gospels

The Synoptic Gospels reveal onomastic conservatism in several respects. Bauckham notes, for example, that Matthew and Luke never add a name to an anonymous person in Mark, although they sometimes drop names.⁶⁷ This could indicate conservatism when moving from early sources (Mark) to later (Matthew, Luke). Ilan notes that NT authors follow common pronunciations rather than Hellenised orthographic practices, which leads to an almost entirely unique situation in the Gospels of the 'βαρ-' category of names

⁶⁵ This number may become marginally increased with the forthcoming publication of the CIIP V, which will focus on inscriptions from Galilee. The CIIP IV includes a helpful onomastic index from inscriptions in the region of Judea, although the vast majority cannot be dated reliably within this onomastic snapshot (W. Ameling, H. M. Cotton, W. Eck et al., (eds.), *Volume 4/Part 2. Iudaea / Idumaea: 3325-3978* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018) 1511–1572). See Simon Gathercole's helpful overview, 'Judaean/Idumaeon Inscriptions and New Testament Studies: A Review of Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae IV/1-2', *JSNT* 42.2 (2019) 242–7. On the scarcity of current datable inscriptions from Galilee, see S. D. Charlesworth, 'The Use of Greek in Early Roman Galilee: The Inscriptional Evidence Re-Examined', *JSNT* 38.3 (2016) 356–95.

⁶⁶ See Gathercole, 'Foreword', in the second edition of Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*. This is not to say that John adds no weight; it contains appropriate onomastic data and adds additional unique attestations for several popular names (e.g. Lazarus, John, and Simon), but its contribution is limited by the scarcity of its data.

⁶⁷ Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 42.

Table 1. Top 12 Jewish Male Names: Occurrences & Percentages

1			2			3			4			5		
<i>ILAN I</i> Total: 2625			30 BCE – 90 CE Total: 371			<i>GOSPELS-ACTS</i> Total: 79			<i>LUKE-ACTS</i> Total: 71			<i>MARK</i> Total: 33		
NAMES	#	%	NAMES	#	%	NAMES	#	%	NAMES	#	%	NAMES	#	%
Simon	243	9.3	Simon	26	7.0	Simon	8	10	Simon	7	9.9	Simon	5	15
Joseph	218	8.3	Joseph	21	5.7	Joseph	6	7.6	Judas	5	7.0	Joseph	4	12
Eleazar	166	6.3	Eleazar	17	4.6	Judas	5	6.3	James	5	7.0	James	4	
Judas	164	6.2	Jesus	15	4.0	John	5		Joseph	4	5.6	John	2	6.0
John	122	4.6	John	14	3.8	James	5		John	4		Judas	2	
Jesus	99	3.8	Ananias	12	3.2	Herod	3	3.8	Herod	3	4.2	Matt.	1	3.0
Ananias	82	3.1	Herod	11	3.0	Jesus	2	2.5	Philip	2	2.8	Herod	1	
Jonathan	71	2.7	Jonathan	10	2.7	Matthew	2		Jesus	2		Jesus	1	
Matthew	62	2.4	Judas	9	2.4	Philip	2		Zech.	2		Philip	1	
Manaen	42	1.6	Alexander	8	2.2	Ananias	2		Levi	2		Alex.	1	
Annas	35	1.3	Agrippa	8		Alex.	2		Ananias	2		Thomas	1	
Ishmael	30	1.1	Matthew	7	1.9	Agrippa	2		Matthew	2		Andrew	1	

(Βαραββᾶς, Βαρνάβας, Βαρτίμαιος, Βαρσαββᾶς, Βαριωνᾶς) that reveals the Palestinian milieu of the gospels, but also that these patronyms likely served locally as nicknames.⁶⁸ Other minor patterns reveal early situational perspectives. Mark, for example, consistently places James son of Zebedee prior to his brother John (1.29; 3.16–19; 5.37; 9.2; 10.35; 13.3; 14.33). The authorial perspective clearly considers James the more prominent disciple, even qualifying John as ‘the brother of James’ (1.29; 3.17; 5.37) despite John’s rise to prominence after the death of James around 44 CE (cf. Gal. 2.9).

The relationship between Semitic style and onomastic data is also significant, although any conclusions drawn from vocabulary or syntax analysis must be held tentatively.⁶⁹ In a study of over 700 Semitisms in Luke, James Edwards concludes that Special Luke (L) material contains 400 per cent more Semitisms than materials shared with Matthew/Mark.⁷⁰ Surprisingly, this highly Semitic material also contains twenty-eight of the forty-four named individuals in Luke. This amounts to 64 per cent of named people, although L only comprises 35 per cent of that Gospel. Not only are named persons concentrated within more Semitic material, but an increase in anonymous people is evidenced in less Semitic material.⁷¹

An independent analysis using Raymond Martin’s syntax criteria produced similar results. Rather than looking for Semitisms, Martin applies seventeen syntactical criteria to determine translation Greek versus original Greek. In these criteria he considers the frequency and arrangement of certain prepositions – an approach he develops based on his analysis of over 6000 lines of Greek text from sources such as Philo, Josephus, Herodotus, Plutarch, and the LXX.⁷² He produces several conclusions when he applies these criteria to the Gospels-Acts.

He concludes, for example, that Mark and Luke-Acts are combinations of translated Semitic and original Greek material. As in Edwards’ analysis on Luke, Martin’s criteria reveal that names cluster around the most primitive pericopes in Mark (1.1–20, 2.13–17, 3.13–19, 5.21–43, esp. 15.21–32, 16.1–8).⁷³

Also pertinent is Martin’s analysis of Special Matthew (M), which he determines is almost entirely original Greek.⁷⁴ While he determines that M contains little to no Semitic translation material, it also contributes zero new names.⁷⁵ If one compares the onomastic data of the Gospels with Martin’s analysis of original Greek versus translation Greek, this is the conclusion: a new Jewish name is never introduced in an original Greek portion of the text.

To review and summarise, onomastic trends in the Synoptic Gospels are thoroughly conservative. Onomastic congruence increases as one looks closer and earlier into these texts. Our survey of onomastic data makes it apparent that the onomastic

⁶⁸ Ilan I, 18.

⁶⁹ This is especially true for the Gospel of Luke. For the most thorough treatment to date, see Albert Hogeterp and Adelbert Denaux, *Semitisms in Luke’s Greek: A Descriptive Analysis of Lexical and Syntactical Domains of Semitic Language Influence in Luke’s Gospel*, WUNT 401 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018).

⁷⁰ J. Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 141–5. Again, Edwards is not without his detractors (e.g. M. Goodacre’s review in CBQ 73.4 (2011) 862–3).

⁷¹ Edwards, *Development*, 145–7.

⁷² R. Martin, *Syntactical Evidence of Semitic Sources in Greek Documents* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1974); *Syntax Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan/ Mellen, 1987); *Syntax Criticism of Johannine Literature, the Catholic Epistles, and the Gospel Passion Accounts* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan/ Mellen, 1989). For a fair, indeed excellent discussion of Martin’s criteria, see S. Farris, *The Hymns of Luke’s Infancy Narratives: Their Origin, Meaning and Significance* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1985), 31–66.

⁷³ Martin, *Synoptic*, 74; *Passion*, 70–2.

⁷⁴ Martin, *Synoptic*, 115–28.

⁷⁵ Exceptions are the public figure Archelaus (2.22) and Jesus’ father Joseph (13.55); cf. Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 42–3.

congruence of Synoptic Gospels is comparative to the biographies of the Early Empire previously examined, and we are now prepared to consider what mechanism best explains onomastic conservatism in the Synoptic Gospels.

9. Explaining Name Recall

Onomastic congruence must result from a mechanism that not only conserves information but also retains apparently meaningless information – names – in their original distributions and forms. The very nature of onomastic congruence, which appears to be an unintentional achievement of authenticity, weighs against the likelihood of a creative mechanism. Yet the irrelevance, and generally poor recall, of personal names also weighs against a strictly organic mechanism behind the phenomenon. Several considerations favour the explanation that onomastic congruence in the Synoptic Gospels results from a mechanism that retained names of living informants or guarantors of the tradition.⁷⁶

The first question facing the historian is why the ἀπομνημονεύματα of Galilean peasants should contain onomastic congruence on a par with the compositions of Suetonius, Plutarch, and Josephus.⁷⁷ Plutarch and Suetonius were known to consult archival material. Suetonius utilises senate proceedings, wills, memoirs, and the imperial libraries, while Plutarch uses fewer sources – memoirs, second-hand sources, eyewitness reports, letters, even oral traditions – but does so with more discretion.⁷⁸ Josephus, too, consulted witnesses, kept notes, and wrote from a perspective of informed familiarity.⁷⁹ Onomastic congruence is reflective of their archival repository and historiographical interest. It is a plausible suggestion in the case of the Synoptic Gospels that this likewise reflects the archival repository available to them only through living tradents. It readily explains the dropping of minor characters' names from Mark's account by Matthew and Luke, the oral feature of many NT names (i.e. the Βαρ-category), and the concentration of names in primitive traditions versus the increased anonymity in later non-Semitic materials.

Again, this data can be explained by the proposal that names were significant while they referred to living informants, but were forgotten as these individuals died or became less well-known. We cannot miss a further observation: whether intentionally or unintentionally, the Evangelists were unafraid to redact layers of tradition, accumulate variations and add fresh theological colour and dialogue, but they do not add names.⁸⁰ These are treated with a unique conservatism.

Names also cluster around significant functions and events. Lists of the Twelve (Mark 3.16–19; Matt. 10.2–4; Luke 6.14–16; Acts 1.13), unlike comparable Rabbinic lists (*m. 'Abot* 2.8–14; *b. Sanh. 43a*), appear to function for the sheer purpose of conserving the names of authentic tradents.⁸¹ While their individual significance is eventually eclipsed by their

⁷⁶ This section implicitly leans on criteria from C. B. McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 19–20.

⁷⁷ For Gospels as memoirs: Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* 1.20; Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 2.15; Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 100.4, 101.3, 103.6; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.1.1.

⁷⁸ M. Licona, 'Are the Gospels "Historically Reliable"? A Focused Comparison of Suetonius's Life of Augustus and the Gospel of Mark', *Religions* 10 (2019) 148; C. Pelling, 'Plutarch's Method of Work in the Roman Lives', *JHS* 99 (1979) 74–96, esp. 87–90.

⁷⁹ D. Moessner, 'Luke as Tradent and Hermeneut: "As one who has a thoroughly informed familiarity with all the events from the top" (παρηκολουθηκότι ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς, Luke 1.3)', *NovT* 58.3 (2016) 259–300, esp. 292–3; Keener, *Christobiography*, 87–8.

⁸⁰ For a list of differences and possible uses of literary devices, see M. Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁸¹ S. McKnight, 'Jesus and the Twelve', *BBR* 11.2 (2001) 203–231, esp. 203.

mere ‘twelveness’, suggesting a fading role, the lists show independence and several signs of primitivity: the prominence of James son of Zebedee over John (Mark 3.17; Matt. 10.2; Luke 6.14), Aramaisms (Βοανηργέζ, Βαρθολομαῖος), appropriate qualifiers, and mnemonic features.⁸²

The named women at the tomb are particularly significant. Carolyn Osiek argues for their primitivity, and that a generally androcentric bias rather than legal considerations (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 4.219) caused the omission of their accounts until their ‘explosion’ into the public kerygma through the Gospels.⁸³ Osiek’s suggestion that they are very old is confirmed by Martin’s syntactical analysis of the pericopes in which these women are named.⁸⁴ The retention of specific – even variant – lists of names may suggest that these women continued to function individually, as witnesses of their experiences during intervening years.⁸⁵

Some named individuals or sets of individuals were already incorporated into creedal statements shortly after Jesus’ death (e.g. Peter, James, and the Twelve; cf. 1 Cor. 15.3–8). That Mark, likely also a performed text, especially retained certain names (esp. Jairus, Bartimaeus, Simon of Cyrene and his sons), suggests the possibility of their significance in early oral performances within certain communities.⁸⁶ Additionally, Kenneth Bailey and T. M. Derico observed the presence of specific informants in oral-based villages in the Middle East. As noted previously, Derico’s transcripts of interviews from his ethnographical fieldwork in Jordan reveal an unusually high concentration of names. Although elements of Bailey’s theory have been thoroughly critiqued by Theodore Weeden, Bailey’s claim that personal names were conserved during the transmission of informal controlled tradition remains unchallenged.⁸⁷ That onomastic congruence exists in the Synoptic Gospels, with names uniquely conserved and tied to significant functions and events, suggests that some names may have been preserved specifically in the oral archives of early Christian communities to footnote living eyewitness sources, paralleling historiographical situations.⁸⁸

Acknowledgements. My thanks to Prof. Bauckham for providing his unpublished material for me to review.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

⁸² For their fading role and the discrepancy between Thaddaeus and Judas son of James, see: D.-A. Koch, ‘The Origin, Function and Disappearance of the “Twelve”: Continuity from Jesus to the Post-Easter Community?’ *HTS* 61.1/2 (2005) 211–229; McKnight, ‘Twelve’, 207–10; Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 93–108.

⁸³ C. Osiek, ‘The Women at the Tomb: What are They Doing There?’ *HTS* 53.1/2 (1997) 103–18.

⁸⁴ Martin, *Passion*, 54; *Synoptic*, 107.

⁸⁵ See also Bauckham’s observations on increased ‘autopsy’ language in *Eyewitnesses*, 521–3; see also, S. Byrskog, *Story as History, History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck: 2000) 49–91.

⁸⁶ See Byrskog’s discussion on Mark and Acts 10.34–43, *Story*, 286–7; R. Horsley, ‘Oral and Written Aspects in the Emergence of the Gospels of Mark as Scripture’, *Oral Tradition* 25.1 (2010) 93–114; M. Larsen, ‘Accidental Publication, Unfinished Texts and the Traditional Goals of New Testament Criticism’, *JSNT* 39.4 (2017) 362–87.

⁸⁷ K. Bailey, ‘Informal Controlled Oral Tradition’, *Themelios* 20 (1995) 4–11, esp. 7–8; T. Weeden, ‘Kenneth Bailey’s Theory of Oral Tradition: A Theory Contested by Its Evidence’, *JSHJ* 7.1 (2009) 3–43; J. Dunn, ‘Kenneth Bailey’s Theory of Oral Tradition: Critiquing Theodore Weeden’s Critique’, *JSHJ* 7.1 (2009) 44–62.

⁸⁸ Regarding which possible names, see Byrskog, *Story*, 266–306; Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 524–35. On parallel historiographical situations, see Hornblower, *Personal Names*, 139–40; R. Shroud, ‘Thucydides and Corinth’, *Chiron* 24 (1994) 267–302.

Cite this article: van de Weghe L (2023). Name Recall in the Synoptic Gospels. *New Testament Studies* 69, 95–109. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688522000170>