Synopses and Lists
Textual Practices in the Pre-Modern World

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Cover image: A fragment of a numbered and tabulated list of 22 biblical and rabbinic passages relating to the Sabbath, each referenced by means of a short lemma (T-S D1.76 from the Cambridge Genizah Collection). Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.
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A LIST IN THREE DIMENSIONS: THE CASE OF EUSEBIUS'S CANON TABLES OF THE GOSPELS

Martin Wallraff

1.0. Synopses and Lists

One of the last books of Umberto Eco (1932–2016) is entitled *Il vertigine della lista*. In this book, the Italian scholar makes a few clear-sighted remarks on lists on the occasion of a series of initiatives at the Louvre in Paris in 2009. The Italian title has been translated rather freely into English as *The Infinity of Lists* and, even worse, into German as *Die unendliche Liste*.[1] These translations reduce the subject to one particular phenomenon: endless, unlimited lists, like the list of the stars in the sky, the list of species in biology, the list of Guinness World Records. However, the book does not deal with this kind of list only. It talks about the *vertigine*, the feeling of dizziness, even of very banal, limited lists of everyday life; their tendency to completeness; their partial and partially failing attempts at establishing order in the world.

Eco does not distinguish between open and closed lists but what he calls practical and poetical lists. The first is a limited

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[1] Eco, *Il vertigine della lista*.

catalogue of "objects in the world," like the shopping list or the catalogue of a library. The latter, the poetical lists, are drawn up "because something cannot be enumerated, it eludes the possibility of control and naming."[2] An example for this kind of list would be the litany of saints in the Roman Catholic liturgy. "Saint so-and-so pray for us"—the litany goes on like this for a long time. Obviously, the time is limited, and the number of saints is limited, but the intention is to enumerate 'all saints'.[3]

In any case, a list is an enumeration of single items, which may or may not be presented in some sort of tabular layout. We are used to seeing lists in the form of a list, but they do not lose their character if they are displayed differently.

Now, what is a synopsis, as opposed to a list? I would suggest the following definition: a synopsis is a list of higher order. Or to be more precise: a list in more than one dimension. The shopping list is a limited enumeration of items in one row. This row can be displayed in various manners, but it remains a row, that is, a file or series of items. A menu in a restaurant is a different situation (fig. 1, *top left*). You can read it in two directions: vertically to see what they have, horizontally to see what price corresponds to what dish. This kind of information actually requires a tabular layout. It would lose its sense if it was arranged differently, for example all dishes as a continuous text, and then all prices as a continuous text.

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[2] Eco, *Il vertigine della lista*, 117. My translation.

[3] Cf. Knopp, 'Sanctorum nomina seriatim'.

Figure 1: Lists and synopses in everyday life: (*top left*) a menu (Gaststätte Atzinger, Munich); (*bottom left*) a timetable (Schifffahrtsgesellschaft des Vierwaldstättersees [SGV] AG, Lucerne); (*right*) a table of contents (from Eco, *Il vertigine della lista*)

This is even more evident in a more complex case like a timetable (fig. 1, *bottom left*). You have a vertical axis with places around Lake Lucerne, and a horizontal axis for times and ships on the lake. The information can also be given differently, such as with the search function of an online timetable, but if you want to see everything on one page, you have to choose this or a very similar layout of a synopsis: a list in two dimensions on the two dimensions of a rectangular page. The concept of page is important here.

The same is true for the classical case in which theologians use the term synopsis, namely the juxtaposition of parallel pericopes from the Bible, mostly from the gospels. This has become so

classical that we even call three of these texts the 'synoptic gospels', because they can conveniently be arranged in three parallel columns in order to be 'seen together' (Greek *sun-horaō*), the etymology of synopsis. Vertically, the sequence of each text is maintained, horizontally the parallels can be compared.[4]

Can there be more than two dimensions, more than the length and breadth of a page? I would argue, yes, and the table of contents of a book may be an example (fig. 1, *right*). At first sight, it is a straightforward table like the menu of a restaurant. Two columns (or three if the chapter numbers are counted) with two possible reading directions, horizontal and vertical. However, this case is more complex. Chapter 12 has the beautiful Italian title 'La Wunderkammer', and we learn from the table that it starts at p. 200. Miraculously, the Wunderkammer corresponds to a round number. Now, it is clear that this is not the sort of consideration that the list is meant for. The number 200 is not significative in itself, but it refers to something other, to a concrete place in the same object, in the same book. This is the difference between Wunderkammer in the book and Weisswurst in the menu. Once you learn that the latter costs €7.20, you are done, whereas page 200 has a deictic value. It refers to something else, to a third dimension outside the two dimensions of a flat page. In contemporary language this could be called a link, even if you cannot click on it (in a good e-book, you can).

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[4] The layout as well as the terminology go back to Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745–1812) and his 1776 edition of the New Testament; see Stallmann, *Johann Jakob Griesbach*, esp. 44–48.

All this is not new. We get lists in one, two, and three dimensions already in antiquity. I would argue that no one mastered this technique better than Eusebius of Caesarea. He has rightly been called an impresario of the codex.[5] I would also call him an impresario of the list. And within the work of Eusebius no other list is more sophisticated—and more beautiful!—than the canon tables of the gospels. In what follows, I will give a very brief introductory explanation of what canon tables are about and how they can be used, an 'instruction manual', as it were. Then there will be three more short sections to illustrate their synoptic character.

2.0. What Are Canon Tables About?

As an example, I use a twelfth-century manuscript that has recently been purchased by the Byzantine collection of Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC (fig. 2).[6] It is a beautiful book, and the canon tables are even more beautiful. These pages are so delicate and so full of sweet and eye-catching details that you may not feel the need to ask for any practical purpose. Their raison d'être is their beauty, and even without any utility it is nice that they are there for the joy of readers, of the person who commissioned the book in the first place, and maybe even of the artist who produced them. Yet they are useful as well; despite their splendour,

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[5] Grafton and Williams, *Transformation of the Book*, 178 (in the subtitle of the relevant chapter).

[6] Washington, DC, Dumbarton Oaks, MS 5 (BZ.2009.033, Gregory/ Aland no. 678), https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:DOAK.MUS:4740200 (accessed 6 December 2021).

these are ultimately very sober and boring tables of numbers. They serve the same purpose as a modern synopsis of the gospels; that is, they help to find parallel passages in the four gospels.[7] Each number stands for a passage in one of them. In the case of fig. 2, there are three columns for the three gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John, and each line is an equation of similar passages. To give just one example, line 10 of the left system contains the numbers ϟζ—σια—ρε (in Arabic numerals, 97—211—105). These numbers can be found at the margins of the text in the book, and they would lead to the following parallel passages (in the New Revised Standard Version):

Matt. 10.39	Luke 17.33	John 12.2
(= section 97)	(= section 211)	(= section 105)
Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.	Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it.	Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

These verses are not identical, but they basically convey the same message.

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[7] To name just a few elements of essential bibliography: Nestle, 'Die Eusebianische Evangelien-Synopse'; Nordenfalk, *Die spätantiken Kanontafeln*; Wessel, 'Kanontafeln'; O'Loughlin, 'Harmonizing the Truth'; Crawford, *Eusebian Canon Tables*; Wallraff, *Die Kanontafeln*.

Figure 2: A page of Eusebius's canon tables, canons III and IV; Washington, Dumbarton Oaks, MS 5 (GA 678), fol. 3v (© Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC)

The whole system is relatively sophisticated. There are a total of 10 tables for the various constellations of four or three or two parallels. Furthermore, there is a short letter accompanying the tables, in which the system, its purpose, and its usage, is explained (the 'Epistula ad Carpianum').

Dozens or even hundreds of Greek copies of Eusebius's work survive, and many more would have existed. Sometimes they are of modest quality, but in many cases they are of stunning splendour and preciosity. Some of the best pieces of medieval book illumination have been accomplished in the context of these modest and sober tables.

And there is not only Greek. Gospel books in virtually all languages of the ancient world were furnished with these tables. Splendid examples can be found in Latin, Armenian, Ethiopic, Syriac, and other languages.[8] In all the corresponding cultures the biblical text travelled together with these tables for many centuries. They were part of the reading experience for many generations of Christians, and they shaped the way in which the Bible was perceived.

It is no exaggeration to say that no other text of antiquity has been copied more often than the canon tables and the accompanying letter—the only exception being the Bible itself. Strangely enough, the favourable situation of transmission contrasts with an unfortunate printing history. Before my own critical edition (which appeared in 2021), only one edition was primarily based on manuscript evidence, and that appeared 500

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[8] See the summary overview in Wallraff, *Die Kanontafeln*, 147–64.

years ago, edited by Erasmus of Rotterdam (1519). All subsequent prints (up to and including the standard edition of the New Testament by Nestle-Aland) did nothing but enrich the text with good and bad conjectures, partial evidence, new errors, and misprints.[9]

A thorough study of the text itself is worthwhile. There are many interesting things to discover, both for the New Testament itself and for the origin of the canon tables. The canon tables are remarkable not only because they bring us to the origins of Christian book illumination,[10] but also for their textual evidence—if indeed we want to call these pages and pages of just numbers 'a text'. Some people might disagree, but I would argue that they are a text in the strictest possible sense of the word: *textus* comes from *texere* and means woven. What we normally call a text should really more accurately be called a *filum*, that is, a row of letters and words, one after the other, a one-dimensional chain or string. In this sense, the gospel book contains four single *fila* on the life of Jesus Christ: four independent, yet partially parallel accounts of the same events. The invention of this synoptic system creates links between them; they are interwoven by means of cross-references from one to the other which creates a web or

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[9] Erasmus's *editio princeps* of the New Testament of 1516 did not contain the canon tables. They were added in the second edition of 1519, *Novum testamentum omne*, 100–108. The modern edition is Wallraff, *Die Kanontafeln*, 175–89; remarks on the history of research and previous editions are found there at pp. 164–72.

[10] See Nordenfalk, 'Beginnings of Book Decoration'; and, of course, his monograph of 1938, *Die spätantiken Kanontafeln*.

textile structure that is symbolically visible in the canon tables at the beginning of the book. This is a *textus* par excellence, by means of which the four gospels become the *one* Gospel, with a capital G. Several interwoven *fila* become one *textus*.

James O'Donnell has called the numbers in these tables "the world's first hot links."[11] The formulation may be somewhat too trendy, but it is not entirely wrong. These numbers point to, refer to, different points in the book. To use them, one has to go continuously back and forth in the text. You would probably use your fingers, or small pieces of paper, to mark the various texts that you are reading almost simultaneously, synoptically. The use of canon tables is not meant for continuous reading of long passages of text, but rather for short consultation. You use them not to read, but to look things up. It is a very scholarly way of using the text. If you were not prepared to turn pages all the time, canon tables would be useless. You must have actual pages (or an electronic structure) to use them. The text must be available in a medium that allows fast and immediate access to any given passage. I stress this point because there is no way of using such a device with the Holy Scripture of Judaism, that is, with a scroll. It is technically impossible to use the fingers, or other bookmarks, to mark two, three, or even four different points in the text and consult them almost simultaneously in a scroll.

This point is so important because the medium of the book (or, in technical terms, of the codex) was relatively new at the beginning of the fourth century. This is the time when the canon

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[11] Quoted in Grafton and Williams, *Transformation of the Book*, 199.

tables originated. Eusebius made use of the new media of his time in a clever and intricate way. This brings me to my third section.

3.0. The Codex in Early Christianity

The codex, as a new form of material support for texts, originated around the first century of the Christian era. The debate on its origins and about its relationship with Christianity is long and old, and there is no need to elaborate on this point here.[12] Suffice it to say that the affinity between Christianity and the codex is very old. Already in the second and third centuries, the predilection of Christians for the new medium is statistically verifiable. On this basis, it has to be asked what the codex actually meant to Christians, what this choice implied for them, and, viewed from the other side, how Christians used the codex, how they adapted it to their needs, and how the medium changed in the process. The first Christian books were rather modest brochures made of papyrus. Scholars have spoken of the antique equivalent of 'paperbacks'. The typical dimensions of a page can be around 15 × 15 cm.[13]

    Now, when we come back to the canon tables, things change. At the beginning of the fourth century we find codices that are entirely different from the modest booklets on papyrus.

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[12] See Wallraff, *Kodex und Kanon*, 13–18.

[13] On early codices in general, see Cavallo, 'Libro e pubblico', 85; on early Christian books ('religion of the paperback'), see Stroumsa, 'Early Christianity'. A well-preserved example of such a booklet is Pap. Bodmer 2 (= P[66] Aland). The codex measures 16.2 × 14.2 cm; it contains the gospel of John.

In the fourth century, some of the most celebrated Christian books of all times originate, artefacts like the Codex Sinaiticus or the Codex Vaticanus.[14] Size, weight, quality, quantity of text, value—everything is different. Some of these manuscripts consist of many hundred pages. The term 'megacodices' is appropriate. What originated as a functional and inexpensive carrier medium, has now become a sumptuous and representative object. What does this all mean for the canon tables?

First, it means that the single biblical books (the book of Genesis, the book of Isaiah) are now joined into one book. The many *biblía* become the one Bible: the word 'Bible' is actually a collective plural of *biblíon*. Therefore, the four gospels are also united in one book.[15] The plurality and unity of the gospel becomes an issue. Second, the conjunction of a group of Christian writings with the old Holy Scripture of Judaism lets some rays of holiness from the latter also shine on the former. Christians now have Holy Scriptures as well—as implied in the diptych 'Old and New Testament'. Third, these large codices are less likely to be owned and used by a single private person, certainly not during travel or in other situations of daily life. They are meant for congregations or libraries, therefore for liturgical or scholarly use.

Eusebius's invention of the canon tables presupposes all these innovations. It has been an enormous success for centuries,

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[14] The bibliography on these famous manuscripts is enormous. I limit myself to one recent title: Andrist, 'Au croisement des contenus'.

[15] See Hengel, *Die vier Evangelien*. However, little attention is paid there to aspects of material culture, and in this sense, the work of David Trobisch, *First Edition*, is of fundamental importance (pace Hengel).

because it responded precisely to the new features in an ingenious way: four gospels in one book, a look-and-feel of holiness, scholarly use. I will elaborate on these points in my final section, but in order to understand Eusebius's work properly, we need to come to the more technical questions of the synoptical list as such.

4.0. Tabular Layouts

The canon tables did not appear out of the blue. Although they were highly innovative, there were precursors and presuppositions. The main innovation in Eusebius's system is the idea of arranging material in tables. In a recent book, Megan Williams and Anthony Grafton have rightly pointed out that Eusebius's most important predecessor was the *Hexapla* of the great Christian exegete and theologian Origen.[16] He drew up a synopsis of the various versions of the Hebrew Bible. The idea was to juxtapose the Hebrew original (along with a transliteration) and all relevant Greek translations in neighbouring columns. The six—sometimes even seven, eight, or nine—columns make use of the entire space of a wide double page of a codex. Of course, in theory it would be possible to implement this same idea in the medium of a scroll as well. However, it would require an enormous amount of scrolling all the time, and there is no evidence that the *Hexapla* ever existed in this form.[17] In fact, the type of reading

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[16] *Pars pro toto* I mention only two titles: Grafton and Williams, *Transformation of the Book*, 86–132; Dorival, 'La forme littéraire'. Both concentrate more on the overall shape than on issues of the content.

[17] See Grafton and Williams, *Transformation of the Book*, 102–5.

required is different: Origen's invention is not meant for normal, 'edifying' Bible reading, and even less for liturgical purposes. It is an aid for philologists, who study variants of textual transmission and translation. The typical reader would already have known the text from elsewhere, and he would have had a specific problem or question that he wished to pursue. Very much like the canon tables, the *Hexapla* is for consultation, rather than bedside reading.

The next example brings us even closer to the canon tables. This is not so much about reading, but about understanding by means of synoptic comparison. Long before inventing the canon tables, Eusebius had used this kind of layout to revolutionise historiography. His first major scholarly work was a universal chronicle.[18] He was not the first Christian author in this field, and actually the material basis of his work is not much richer than that of his third-century predecessor Julius Africanus. The strong term 'revolutionise' is appropriate for Eusebius because the innovation was the tabular layout: in his chronological 'canon', Eusebius arranged all the lengthy lists of kings of various peoples in such a way that contemporary events in each reign were parallelised. The work has come down to us only in its Latin and Armenian translation, and fig. 3 shows a double page in an early Latin codex with no less than seven columns. The synchronism of the history of the Assyrians, the Hebrews, the Athenians etc. becomes visually clear. The *fila regnorum* of the single national histories are interwoven into one history of humankind. This list is

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[18] See Burgess and Tougher, 'Eusebius of Caesarea'. The visual aspects are emphasised in Rosenberg and Grafton, *Cartographies of Time*, 15.

in two dimensions, and in this sense somewhat less complex than the canon tables of the gospels.

Figure 3: The history of humankind in synoptic columns, Eusebius, chronicle, Latin translation; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. T.2.26, fols 50v–51r (© Bodleian Library, Oxford)
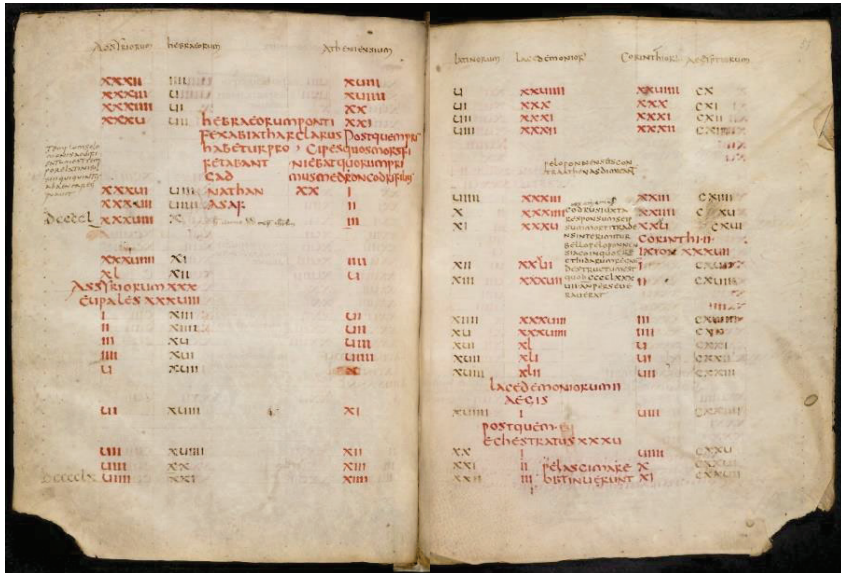
However, there is a predecessor for the third dimension as well, that is, the 'hypertext' aspect, the fact that texts are represented by numbers, which have the character of cross-references or 'hot links'. Only the deictic aspect of numbered references gave the system the slenderness to actually work. Some predecessors of Eusebius had the same basic idea—the only difference had been that they arranged actual texts rather than numbers. The four gospels were lumped together into one text by Tatian in his

Diatessaron.[19] A few years later Ammonius, somewhat more so-
phisticated, had drawn up a sort of synopsis, in which he juxta-
posed various parallels for each passage of Matthew.[20] The result
was not only cumbersome to handle, it also ruined the integrity
of the holy text, at least for the three gospels after Matthew. In
the words of Eusebius: "The coherent sequence of the three was
destroyed as far as the network of reading is concerned."[21] The
expression 'network of reading' or 'web of reading' is quite unu-
sual, and I think it is remarkable. It points to what I would call a
typically late antique reading experience: the texture of reading,
'text' in its literal meaning. Only the grid of deictic numbers al-
lowed for both: organic, continuous reading as well as cross-ref-
erences of intertextuality.

     Already in an earlier work Eusebius had used this specific
innovation. In what may be called 'the canon tables of the
psalms', numbers are listed, not full texts (fig. 4). It is a very sim-
ple list. In several sections the psalms written by David, Solomon,
and so on are listed.[22] This is not a synopsis, there is no vertical

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[19] See the contributions in Crawford and Zola, *Gospel of Tatian*.

[20] The only source on this work is Eusebius's 'Epistula ad Carpianum',
in which the predecessor is briefly mentioned at the beginning (§2).
Crawford, 'Ammonius of Alexandria', provides a detailed analysis,
although I do not agree with his conclusions in all aspects; see Wallraff,
Die Kanontafeln, 22–24.

[21] …ὡς ἐξ ἀνάγκης συμβῆναι τὸν τῆς ἀκολουθίας εἱρμὸν τῶν τριῶν διαφθαρῆναι
ὅσον ἐπὶ τῷ ὕφει τῆς ἀναγνώσεως. 'Epistula ad Carpianum', §2 (line 6 in
Wallraff, *Die Kanontafeln*).

[22] See Wallraff, 'Canon Tables of the Psalms'.

and horizontal reading direction, no comparison between columns. The material could also be arranged differently, for example in continuous text, without losing the information. However, it refers to textual units outside the page. It presupposes the numbered subdivision of the Psalter, and it must be possible to go back and forth easily. This list is also in two dimensions, albeit not on the physical extension of a page. It is an important presupposition for the extremely complex composition of the canon tables of the gospels.

Figure 4: Canon tables of the psalms; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D.4.1, fols 24v–25r (© Bodleian Library, Oxford)

5.0. Symphony of the Gospels

As I said before, in a megacodex like the Sinaiticus you can physically perceive something of the beauty and of the holiness of the

biblical text. It is almost literally of imperial sumptuousness. Constantine ordered 50 copies at the scriptorium of Caesarea for the churches of the new capital founded by him: even if there is no evidence that the Sinaiticus was one of them, it may be *like* one of them.[23] At the same time, it must have contained the canon tables. Unfortunately, the tables themselves have not been preserved, yet they must have existed, as the marginal numbers of the Eusebian system show.[24] Thus, this is the earliest preserved attestation of the whole work—which is quite remarkable. Which other late antique text is physically attested at a distance of maybe one generation after it has been written?

The reason why I insist on this codex is that the scholarly apparatus and complicated cross-reference system did not prevent the manuscript from serving any purpose such a manuscript could possibly serve. It may well have been used for liturgical worship in one of the Constantinopolitan churches. It may well have been used by the emperor as a prestigious gift to a noble person. It may well have been read by a devout Christian, provided that he or she could afford such a precious Bible. All this would not have been true for Origen's *Hexapla*, which was targeted only at a scholarly market; as is well known, this market is

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[23] The imperial letter is preserved in Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 4,36; Eusebius complied (4,37). However, it should be noted that the letter does not speak of 50 *Bibles* (let alone pandects like the Codex Sinaiticus). Previous research was often based on false implicit assumptions. Likewise, it was often—baselessly—assumed that Sinaiticus actually belonged to the group produced in Caesarea.

[24] See Wallraff, *Die Kanontafeln*, 139–40.

very narrow and restricted—less promising for a great success during many centuries to come.

Eusebius's canon tables were so successful because they did not destroy the integrity of the sacred text. To the contrary: they highlighted its sanctity in a specific way. There is reason to think that a feature which is preserved in several manuscripts was already a part of the archetype. In a tenth-century manuscript in Venice, a splendid series of canon tables ends with a page with a beautiful tholos (*tempietto*). Carl Nordenfalk had already observed in 1938 the striking similarity of this tholos in some Greek manuscripts with similar images in very different cultures and traditions. Very similar motifs at the end of the canon tables can be found in Armenian, Ethiopic, and Latin manuscripts (fig. 5). When seeing these pictures on one page, one should always bear in mind that these illuminated manuscripts originated at a distance of several hundred years and several thousand miles from one another. This similarity would be difficult to explain if these motifs did not have common roots. According to Nordenfalk, they might even go back to the Eusebian archetype[25]—and this opinion has never been seriously questioned. I think there is additional evidence in its support, and that comes from its inscription.

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[25] Nordenfalk, *Die spätantiken Kanontafeln*, 102–8.

Figure 5: Tholos in Greek, Ethiopic, Armenian, and Latin gospel books: (*top left*) Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Marc. I 8 (GA U / 030), fol. 3r; (*top right*) Abba Garima gospel book I (today bound in gospel book II, f. 258v; from McKenzie and Watson, *The Garima Gospels*); (*bottom left*) Yerevan, Matenadaran, cod. 3474, fol. 5v (from Buschhausen and Buschhausen, *Codex Etschmiadzin*); (*bottom right*) Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 8850, fol. 6v (Soissons gospel book)

 In the Venice manuscript we read: *Hypothesis kanonos tēs tōn euaggelistōn sumfōnias*. Literally (and badly) translated, this states: 'Purpose/structure of the canon of the symphony of the evangelists'. I have not translated *sumfōnia* here, because it is a meaningful term, although 'harmony' would probably render the idea better in modern languages. A careful analysis of the oldest textual witnesses shows that this inscription too must be very old; in all likelihood it also goes back to the archetype. This is corroborated by the fact that the Ethiopic version also contains a very similar inscription in many copies.[26]

 The inscription is partly similar to certain formulations in Eusebius's letter accompanying the canon tables, and so one might think that somebody developed it on this basis at a later stage. However, this seems unlikely, since 'symphony' is not used there, but there is a close parallel in Eusebius's *Church History*, where he also speaks of the "symphony of the evangelists."[27] This is actually Eusebian language; hence, it seems likely that the tholos was already there in the archetype and that it was explained and accompanied by this inscription.[28]

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[26] Wallraff, *Die Kanontafeln*, 100.

[27] *Historia ecclesiastica* 6,31,3 (referring to Julius Africanus); see also 1,7,1; 2,10,2.

[28] See the overview of various positions of the text in Wallraff, *Die Kanontafeln*, 96–97.

There are, by the way, also manuscripts in which only the inscription has been preserved, not the tholos. One example is the gospel book at Dumbarton Oaks.[29]

What does this all mean, and why is it important whether the inscription is old or not? It is so important because it can be seen as the key to Eusebius's theological intention for the whole project. The tholos, as well as the inscription, expresses well the way in which Eusebius wanted to resolve the old problem of the plurality and unity of the gospels. There is one Jesus, but there are four similar accounts of his life. Earlier attempts at uniting these four literary units by Tatian and Ammonius had failed. Eusebius found a way of maintaining the integrity of each gospel, and at the same time of uniting them in one text or, maybe better, hypertext. This unity becomes concrete and visible for a non-expert as well, even for a reader who does not really understand or care about the complex scholarly system of numerical cross-references. The four columns of the tholos carry one common roof, and the inscription stresses the harmony of the four gospels. The curtains between the columns both conceal and open the way to the sanctuary (see, e.g., the famous Ejmiacin gospel book of the tenth century in Armenian, bottom left in fig. 5). This is a truly worthy doorway to the holy text. Maybe the most beautiful visual expression of this idea can be found in the Rossano codex, written in the sixth century on purple parchment (fig. 6). Images of the

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[29] Dumbarton Oaks MS 5, fol. 7v (at the beginning of the 'Epistula ad Carpianum').

four evangelists are integrated into one endless chain; in the middle, the Eusebian inscription of the symphony of the gospels gives a hermeneutical key.

Figure 6: Tondo with four evangelists' portraits; Rossano, Museo Diocesano e del Codex (GA Σ/042), fol. 5r (© Museo Diocesano e del Codex, Rossano)

Not only did the scholarly lists not destroy the holy text, rather they highlighted it. Eusebius's invention was an important step in the process of the 'sacralisation' of Christian holy writings. The invention is so ingenious, and maybe it was so successful,

because it allowed for different approaches that did not exclude one another: the spiritual, the aesthetic, and the scholarly aspect were all present in one book, so they might appeal to different readers, in different situations.