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Communities That Write: Christ-Groups, Associations, and Gospel Communities*

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Critics who posit the 'gospels for all Christians' theory contend that gospels reflect neither the history nor the concerns of the communities within which they were produced. Despite advocacy for the theory from an increasing number of scholars, others continue to reconstruct diverse gospel communities. There is some common ground between the two sides of the debate: the majority of scholars from both perspectives agree that gospels were composed within communal settings. If we take this agreement as our starting point and investigate communal writing practices in antiquity, we might productively forge an agreeable method for determining the scope of intended gospel audiences. This study analyzes the collective process of writing in ancient associations, now regarded as analogous in many ways to early Christ-groups. In doing so, a framework is provided for understanding how and to whom gospels produced in Christ-groups might have been composed. The study finds the 'all Christians' theory inconsistent with communal practices of writing.

Keywords: Christ-groups, associations, gospel communities, writing

1. Gospels and Communities

Since 1998, NT critics have debated whether the gospels were written for specific communities,[1] 'all Christians',[2] or a little of

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1 E.g. D. C. Sim, 'The Gospels for All Christians: A Response to Richard Bauckham', *JSNT* 84 (2001) 3–27; J. Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (AB 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 25–8; T. Kazen, 'Sectarian Gospels for Some Christians? Intention and Mirror Reading in the Light of Extra-canonical Texts', *NTS* (2005) 561–78; and P. F. Esler, 'Community and Gospel in Early Christianity: A Response to Richard Bauckham's *Gospels for All Christians*', *SJT* 51 (1998) 235–48.

2 E.g. R. Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); D. N. Peterson, *The Origins of Mark: The Markan Community in*

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both.[3] Given the impact any solution would have on scholarly conceptions of unity and diversity in the early Jesus movement, it comes as no surprise that the debate launched by R. Bauckham continues to garner much interest. The discussion has taken place on familiar grounds since its inception; for insights into the breadth of intended gospel audiences, Bauckham and others turn to questions of communication and travel among early Christ-groups,[4] intended audiences of biographical literature,[5] and patristic understandings of initial gospel audiences.[6] Peculiarly, none of these topics relate to communal practices of writing in antiquity. This is odd because the majority of critics agree that gospels were composed and read within group settings.[7] The present study re-directs our

Current Debate (BIS 48; Leiden: Brill, 2000); M. F. Bird, 'The Markan Community, Myth or Maze? Bauckham's *The Gospels for All Christians* Revisited', *JTS* 37 (2006) 474–86; Bird, 'Bauckham's *The Gospels for all Christians* Revisited', *EJT* 15 (2006) 5–13; Hengel, *Four Gospels*. M. Mitchell supports Bauckham's objections to the traditional consensus, but contests aspects of his thesis: 'Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim that "The Gospels Were Written for All Christians"', *NTS* 51 (2005) 36–79 (37-8, 78). See also T. Hägerland, 'John's Gospel: A Two-Level Drama?', *JSNT* 25 (2003) 209–22; E. W. Klink III, ed., *The Audience of the Gospels: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity* (LNTS 353; London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010). Bauckham's work heightened the profile of the debate, but prior to 1998 there were several critics who already questioned the ability to reconstruct gospel communities: e.g. L. T. Johnson, 'On Finding Lukan Community: A Cautious Cautionary Essay', *SBLASP* (1979) 87–100; E. Judge, 'The Social Identity of the First Christians: A Question of Method in Religious History', *JRH* 11 (1980) 201–17 (208); and D. Allison, 'Was There a "Lukan Community"?', *IRB* 10 (1988) 62–70.

3 E.g. C. L. Blomberg, 'The Gospels for Specific Communities *and* All Christians', *The Audience of the Gospels* (ed. E. W. Klink III) 111–33; and E. van Eck, 'A Sitz for the Gospel of Mark? A Critical Reaction to Bauckham's Theory on the Universality of the Gospels', *HTS* 56 (2000) 973–1008. While this idea is gaining support, it creates an unsuccessful synthesis of redactional and new approaches to gospel audiences.

4 R. Bauckham, 'For Whom Were Gospels Written?', *The Gospels for All Christians* (ed. R. Bauckham) 9–48; R. S Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians* (WUNT 2/161. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 91–108; Ascough, 'Local and Translocal Relationships Among Voluntary Associations and Early Christianity', *JECS* 5 (1997) 223–41; and Sim, 'Gospels'.

5 R.A. Burridge, 'About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences', *The Gospels for All Christians* (ed. Bauckham) 113–45; and J. M. Smith, 'About Friends, by Friends, for Others: Author–Subject Relationships in Contemporary Greco-Roman Biographies', *The Audience of the Gospels* (ed. Klink III) 49–67.

6 Mitchell, 'Patristic'; and R. Bauckham, 'Is there Patristic Counter-Evidence? A Response to Margaret Mitchell', *The Audience of the Gospels* (ed. Klink III) 68–110.

7 Almost all critics agree that the gospels were composed and used in communal settings. To give just a selection of examples, see Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 28–9; A. J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994) 1; R. Bauckham, 'For Whom', 30; and A. Reinhartz, 'Gospel Audiences: Variations on a Theme', *The Audience of the Gospels* (ed. Klink III) 134–52 (139–40). M. Hengel suggests that the gospels might not

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attention to the heart of the issue: How did ancient communities produce and use their writings?

Recently, several scholars of Christian origins have compared the practices and language of Christ-groups with Greco-Roman and Judean associations.[8] They find associations to be analogous to early churches in many ways, including conflict management strategies,[9] postures towards the *polis*,[10] trans-local relationships,[11] and recruitment techniques.[12] In this study, another comparator is added: communal writing habits. Analysing the writing practices of associations provides a much-needed framework for understanding how and for whom gospels might have been composed within analogous Christ-groups.[13] This study finds Bauckham's 'all Christians' theory inconsistent with ancient communal writing practices on two

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have been written within particular churches, but does not provide substantive support for this assertion. See *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2000) 77–8, 106–8. Hengel's suggestion fails to account for the 'group-oriented' nature of ancient Mediterranean society. See Esler, 'Community and Gospel'.

8 E.g. J. S. Kloppenborg, 'Edwin Hatch, Churches and Collegia', *Origins and Method: Towards a New Understanding of Judaism and Christianity* (ed. B. H. McLean; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 212–38; Kloppenborg, 'Egalitarianism in the Myth and Rhetoric of Pauline Churches', *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack* (ed. E. A. Castelli and H. Taussig; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1996) 247–63; R. S. Ascough, 'Voluntary Associations and the Formation of Pauline Christian Communities: Overcoming the Objections', *Vereine, Synagogen und Gemeinden in kairserzeitlichen Kleinasiens* (ed. A. Gutsfeld and D.-A. Koch; STAC 25; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2006) 149–83; Ascough, *Macedonian*; Ascough, 'Matthew and Community Formation', *The Gospel of Matthew in Current Study: Studies in Memory of William G. Thompson, S. J.* (ed. D. E. Aune; Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001) 96–126; P. A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians* (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2009); E. Ebel, *Die Attraktivität früher christlicher Gemeinden: Die Gemeinde von Korinth im Spiegel griechisch-römischer Vereine* (WUNT 178; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); D. E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); T. Schmeller, *Hierarchie und Egalität. Eine sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung paulinischer Gemeinden und griechisch-römischer Vereine* (SBS 162; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1995); and W. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000) 49.

9 Kloppenborg, 'Edwin Hatch'.

10 Harland, *Associations*.

11 Ascough, 'Translocal Relationships', 223–41.

12 Although Ebel emphasizes recruitment strategies used by the Corinthians that are not common among associations, see her *Attraktivität*.

13 Discussions of methodological procedures for performing comparisons of the available data can be found in Kloppenborg, 'Edwin Hatch'; and R. S. Ascough, 'Comparative Perspectives: Early Christianity and the Roman Empire', *Forschungsbericht Römische Religion (2006–2008)* (ed. A. Bendlin and M. Haase; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2009) 382–90.

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levels. First, associations wrote out of self-interest. Their narratives reflect their communal histories and their other writings, such as bylaws and honorary decrees, were composed for the collective good of the community. This finding challenges proponents of the 'all Christians' theory to explain why we should believe that Christ-groups wrote narratives for a uniquely broad audience and for especially altruistic purposes in comparison with practices in communal analogues. Second, association writings were proudly produced by all members, not just single authors who may or may not have represented the collective values and history of the community. Such a finding again isolates the manner with which gospels were produced on the 'all Christians' theory.[14] Since this article marks the first contribution to the gospel communities debate that considers analogous *communities*, the following section is devoted to a discussion of how association writings are applicable to the gospel communities debate, outlining both their limits and potential. This section is followed by a presentation of the association data, a brief investigation of communal practices of writing in early Christ-groups that uses the scant available data, and, finally, a tentative suggestion for how and why the gospels eventually achieved broad readership even though they were meant for specific congregations.

2. Evidence from Associations

The traditional function-based typology of associations distinguishes between occupational, cultic, and funerary guilds.[15] Recent work by F. Ausbüttel and J. S. Kloppenborg has convincingly challenged this typology by demonstrating that *collegia funeraticia* did not exist until well after the first century CE.[16] Kloppenborg has also shown that all types of associations took part in a variety of activities, which further damages the value of a function-based typology. He proposes a classificatory system based on membership profiles. On the basis of membership profiles, we can distinguish between five types of associations: household or familial, ethnic, neighborhood, occupational,

14 Burridge believes that '[t]hese four individual accounts [i.e. NT gospels], each concerned with the resolution of their particular themes, suggest that they have been composed, not by communities, but by four single writers each of whom wants to portray a particular view of Jesus in his gospel in the manner of ancient biography'. See 'About People', 130–1.

15 J. P. Waltzing, *Étude historique sur les corporations professionnelles chez les Romains depuis les origines jusqu'à la chute de l'empire d'Occident* (Mémoires couronnés et autres mémoires publiée par l'Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique 50; 4 vols., Bruxelles: Hayez, 1895–1900) 1.32–56; E. Kornemann, 'Collegium', *PW* 4 (1901) 380–480 (386–403); and G. La Piana, 'Foreign Groups in Rome During the First Centuries of the Empire', *HTR* 20 (1927) 183–403 (239–44).

16 F. Ausbüttel, *Untersuchungen zu den Vereinen im Westen des römischen Reiches* (Frankfurter althistorische Studien 11; Kallmünz: Lassleben, 1982); and J. S. Kloppenborg, 'Collegia and *thiasoi*: Issues in Function, Taxonomy and Membership', *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. J. S. Kloppenborg and S. G. Wilson; London: Routledge, 1996) 16–30.

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and cultic or temple.[17] The data used in this study come from all types of associations since the cultic aspect of associative life (that aspect most commonly linked to group life in the Jesus movement) transcends the categories.[18] To name some examples: *IDelos* 1520 (153/2 BCE) is from a group that was a professional, ethnic, and cultic association all at once; an association of gladiators honored their priest for making reliefs to the gods (*Philippi* II 142/G562; II-III CE); a banqueting association in first-century Thessalonica had cultic connections (*IG* X/2.1 70; 66–67 CE), as did a guild of purple-dyers in second-century Macedonia (*IG* X/2.1 291; late II CE); and Luke references a guild of silversmiths in Asia Minor that worshipped Artemis (Acts 19.23–27). Much recent scholarship on synagogues now maintains that these groups were types of associations[19] and thus synagogue writings are also represented in this study.

The comparative methodology proposed in this article is not without problems and limitations. The most restrictive limitation is that we do not know enough about the Christ-groups responsible for the gospels to label them definitively as associations. Of the first-century congregations about which we know something, we are most informed about Paul's Corinthian congregation. Several critics have drawn comparisons between the Corinthians and associations.[20] The Corinthians met regularly for social activities of dining and worshipping,[21] adhered to group regulations that limited conflict between affiliates,[22] and were the beneficiaries

17 For an instructive discussion of each type, see Harland, *Associations*, 28–53.

18 J. S. Kloppenborg, ed., with R. S. Ascough, *Attica, Central Greece, Macedonia, Thrace* (vol. 1 of *Associations in the Greco-Roman World*; BZNW 181; Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 2011) 1–13.

19 P. G. Richardson, 'Early Synagogues as Collegia in the Diaspora and Palestine', *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. Kloppenborg and Wilson) 90–109; Richardson, 'An Architectural Case for Synagogues as Associations', *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins Until 200 C.E.: Papers Presented at an International Conference at Lund University October 14–17, 2001* (ed. B. Olson and M. Zetterholm; CBNT 39; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003) 90–117; M. Linghardt, 'The Manual of Discipline in the Light of Statues of Hellenistic Associations', *Methods of Investigation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Khirbet Qumran Site: Present Realities and Future Prospects* (ed. J. J. Collins, M. Wise, N. Golb, and D. Pardee; Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences 722; New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1994) 251–70; A. Runesson, *Origins of the Synagogue: A Socio-Historical Study* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001); and Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Attica*, 340–5.

20 For example, Kloppenborg, 'Egalitarianism'; Ebel, *Attraktivität*; Schmeller, *Hierarchie*; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 173–217; R. Cameron, ed., with M. P. Miller, *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians* (vol. 2 of *Redescribing Christian Origins*; SBLSS; Atlanta: Scholars, 2011); R. S. Ascough, 'The Completion of a Religious Duty: The Background of 2 Cor 8.1–15', *NTS* 42 (1996) 584–99.

21 R. S. Ascough, 'Forms of Commensality in Greco-Roman Associations', *CW* 102 (2008) 33–45.

22 There is some evidence for Corinthian usage of written bylaws. See J. C. Hanges, '1 Corinthians 4:6 and the Possibility of Written Bylaws in the Corinthian Church', *JBL* 117 (1998) 275–98.

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of resourceful members such as Gaius, Chloe, and Stephanas. All of these practices resemble associative life.

Gospel communities, as well as Pauline congregations, shared enough commonalities with *collegia* for ancient and modern writers to make the link. D. Duling proposes that '[t]he Matthean *ekklesia* can be described as a fictive kinship group or fictive brotherhood association'.[23] Likewise, W. Carter, after suggesting several parallels between the Matthean community and associations, argues that outsiders and members would have perceived the Matthean community as an association.[24] Several other scholars arrive at the same conclusion.[25] These portrayals are consistent with Pliny's depiction of Christian groups as *hetaeriae*, a term regularly employed to describe associations (*Ep*. 10.96; cf. 10.34); Lucian's depiction of Christianity as a 'new mystery' (καινὴ τελετή) and of leaders within the movement as θιασάρχης, προστάτης and other association titles (*Peregr*. 11); Celsus' statement that Christians established 'secret societies' (συνθήκας κρύβδην) (Origen *Cels*. 1.1); and Eusebius' description of Christians as θιασῶται (*Hist. eccl*. 1.3.12).[26] The notion that early Christ-groups resembled the practices of associations has solid grounding.

A second potential methodological problem is the fact that association writings are not generically analogous to the gospels, though *thiasoi* and *collegia* produced more narrative material than is sometimes acknowledged. In addition to narratives, associations commonly wrote group bylaws and honorary decrees.[27] What do these kinds of writings have to do with gospel audiences? The significance of bylaws, decrees, and association narratives is that they were written by communities analogous to (or the same as) Christ-groups and therefore inform us of the ways and reasons that these communities took part in writing.[28]

23 D. C. Duling, 'The Matthean Brotherhood and Marginal Scribal Leadership', *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context* (ed. P. F. Esler; London: Routledge, 1995) 159–82 (178).

24 Carter, *Matthew*, 49.

25 Saldarini, *Matthew's*, 194; M. H. Crosby, *House of Disciples: Church, Economics, & Justice in Matthew* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988) 104–10; and Ascough, 'Matthew and Community Formation', 96–126.

26 For more examples see Kloppenborg, 'Greco-Roman *Thiasoi*, the *Ekklēsia* at Corinth, and Conflict Management', *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians* (ed. Cameron and Miller) 187–218 (195 n. 25).

27 O. M. van Nijf estimates that one-third of all association inscriptions are honorary decrees. See *The Civic World of Professional Associations in the Roman East* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1997) 74.

28 This study focuses on associations not only because they represent the closest communal analogy to early Christ-groups, but also because other communal models are currently too problematic for a study of this nature. The problem with using philosophical schools is that our information regarding actual schools around the first century is lacking. Only two schools (Neopythagorians and Epicureans) during this time had established themselves into structured organizations whereas others were not 'schools' like these two. Access to the practices of these communities is complicated by the fact that information on the

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In addition to the potential fruits of a community-based approach to investigating the scope of intended gospel audiences, another reason for shifting our efforts away from genre and towards community is that the genre of the gospels (biography) tells us little about their intended audiences. At most, critics are left with claims by Philostratus who states that his *Apollonius of Tyana* was written for Empress Julia Domna and her circle, Plutarch's dedication of the *Lives* to the Roman Q. Sosius Senecio, and Luke's dedication of his gospel and Acts to Theophilus. Such dedications do not reveal much about actual intended audiences.[29] Since ancient biographers tell us next to nothing about the intended scope of their audiences, it makes little sense to measure gospel audiences against the audiences of biographies.[30]

Pythagorean school is from two third-century writers, Iamblichus and Philostratus; and minimal data exists for the study of Epicurean schools during this period. The problem with using the so-called mystery cults is that they do not provide us with texts that have known provenance. Regarding the Orphic Hymns, for example, A. N. Athanassakis notes that '[t]he place in which the Hymns were composed and used is not known'. This comment holds true for most of the mystery texts collected by M. W. Meyer in his 1999 sourcebook. These documents are not ideal for a study of the writing practices of specific, extant, communities. See R. S. Ascough, *What Are They Saying About The Formation of Pauline Churches?* (New York: Paulist, 1998) 32–3; H. K. Usener, *Epicurea* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1887) 135; W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University, 1983) 81–4; M. W. Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1999); and A. N. Athanassakis, *The Orphic Hymns: Text, Translation, and Notes* (SBLTT 12; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977).

29 See L. C. A. Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1* (SNTSMS 78; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993).

30 Our lack of dependable information regarding biographers' intended audiences is not the only reason to avoid genre-specific studies of gospel audiences. Arguments supporting broad intended audiences of biographies are unconvincing. R. Burridge's suggestion that the function of apologetic and polemic biographies speaks in favour of broad intended readership is perhaps one of the most convincing cases that can be made for the 'all Christians' theory using genre. However, even this argument is unconvincing due to its excessively hypothetical nature: the gospels were written for 'all Christians' *if* apologetic and polemic were functions of biographies and *if* these functions meant wider audiences and *if* the gospels were the kinds of biographies that had apologetic and polemic functions and *if* these biographies were analogous to gospels in terms of audience. A more straightforward line of investigation is to analyze the writings of analogous communities rather than to try to extend the biography analogy to questions of gospel audiences. See Burridge, 'About People', 134–7. A full review of R. Burridge's work would note, as others have, differences in content between gospel literature and biographies, which destabilize our understanding of the genre of the gospels—a further obstacle to reliance on genre for intended gospel audiences. Gospels as Hellenistic historiography: A. Yarbro Collins, *Mark* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); gospels as Jewish novels: M. E. Vines, *The Problem of Markan Genre: The Gospel of Mark and the Jewish Novel* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2002).

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Another problem with anchoring a study of gospel audiences on genre is that the intended audience of communal writings was not determined solely (or at all) by genre. As will hopefully be demonstrated in this article, the scope of audiences for association writings was affected by broader trends: communities wrote everything, regardless of genre, in the interest of their group's preservation and values. Associations also required approval of their general membership before a piece of writing could become authoritative within the communities. These practices led to narrow audiences.

In its present form, the approach from genre is incompatible with the approach employed in this study. R. Burridge maintains that gospels, like biographies, do not reflect the attitudes and opinions of the communities from which they were written. Rather, the gospels were composed by individuals (within communities) who wrote without significant regard for communal concerns. According to Burridge, communal writings are different from texts written by individuals. Communal writings are 'turgid committee reports or community minutes'.[31] This argument fails to convince. First, this understanding of communal writing is misinformed: the thousands of extant association papyri and epigraphy cannot all be categorized as 'turgid committee reports or community minutes'. Furthermore, the assumption that perspectives of group members do not impact the writing of co-members is puzzling. Burridge's reason for making this leap is the narrative-critical work on the gospels demonstrating that each evangelist wrote coherent stories about Jesus. He posits: 'These four individual accounts, each concerned with the resolution of their particular themes, suggest that they have been composed, not by communities, but by four single writers each of whom wants to portray a particular view of Jesus in his Gospel in the manner of ancient biography'.[32] The logic here obviously does not follow; there is nothing to suggest that coherent stories about Jesus could not reflect communal beliefs and values. As will be demonstrated below, communal writings *do* reflect the values and beliefs of their communities, not just individual authors. In fact, it is unrealistic to think of any ancient narrative as having been written exclusively by one author without input from others.

The stakes in this debate are perhaps particularly high for Burridge. As is well known, before the articulation of the 'all Christians' theory, Burridge's excellent 1992 monograph had shaped the *communis opinio* regarding gospel genre.[33] However, when in 1998 he extended this theory into the study of intended gospel audiences, he encountered a methodological problem posed by the fact

31 Burridge, 'About People', 126.

32 Burridge, 'About People', 130–1.

33 R. A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992).

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that biographies were not written in communities like early churches or associations. Burridge admits, for example, that Tacitus's *Agricola* was written among 'Tacitus and his family'.[34] The *Agricola* was thus written 'among the educated upper classes of Roman public life'.[35] In fact, as P. Esler has pointed out, all ten of the biographies studied at length by Burridge in his monograph were composed by members of the ruling elite, whom S. Friesen supposes to have constituted approximately three percent of ancient urban populations in the Second Temple and early Roman periods.[36] Burridge is obliged to downplay the impact of early churches on gospels because if communities influenced the writing of gospels and biographies, then the two sets of literature might differ significantly due to their different environments of production. Thus, for Burridge, Tacitus's elite household did not affect the *Agricola* while Mark's community did not impact the writing of Mark's gospel. This discrepancy is not reason to abandon the biography theory, but it is reason to recognize the limitation of the analogy. A problem with the argument from genre in support of the 'all Christians' theory is that the discrepancy between settings of production is not appreciated, and, moreover, the impact of communities on communal writings is ignored.

There exists much potential in studying communal practices of writing for insights into the breadth of intended gospel audiences. The communal settings in which gospels were written, and the cultural norms therein, would have governed how and why Christ-groups wrote. It is worth considering what association writings tell us about compositional practices within ancient communal settings.

34 Burridge, 'About People', 133.

35 R. A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd ed. 2004) 179. All subsequent references to this book refer to the second edition.

36 Burridge admits this much himself. The biographies that he studies most closely 'reveal a setting within the educated and ruling classes' (*Gospels*, 145; cf. 179–80). He cites W. Meeks as providing support for the notion that Christ-believers enjoyed relatively high status. However, recent work by J. Meggitt and S. Friesen has challenged the so-called 'new consensus' that Meeks represents. Esler critiques the application of the biography analogy for insights into gospel audiences on the basis of the different statuses of their authors. He argues, 'When they [i.e. the biographers studied by Burridge] wrote they no doubt had in mind reaching wide stretches of this primary reference group [i.e. "the upper level of Greek or Roman society"] or at least particular sections within it. Their position was, in short, utterly different from that of the small groups of people who acknowledged a human being known as Jesus Christ as their saviour… Anyone writing for people like this would inevitably be affected by the extent to which they were alienated from surrounding culture as much as part of it. They would primarily write for their reference group, the communities of which they were members'. See 'Community and Gospel', 244; cf. J. J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Studies of the New Testament and its World; Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1998); S. Friesen, 'Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus', *JSNT* 26 (2004) 323–61; S. Friesen and W. Scheidel, 'The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire,' *JRS* 99 (2009) 61–91; and Burridge, *Gospels*, 145, 154–5, 179–80.

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The next two sections of this article provide an analysis of writing patterns within associations. I wish to draw attention to two customs in the production of communal writings within the following pages. First, associations wrote out of collective self-interest. This practice is discernible from the content of association narratives and the motivations behind composing honorific material and decrees. Second, since approval from the general membership was needed before association writings were deemed authoritative by the group, the content of association writings reflects the communal histories (narratives) and values (bylaws and decrees) of the group as a whole, not just the viewpoints of selected representatives.

3. Association Narratives: Writings About and For Specific Communities

Associations composed narratives out of an interest to document their collective history. An association devoted to Sarapis at Delos, for example, narrates several pivotal details in their group's origin and identity. The beginning of the Delian aretalogy of Sarapis reads as follows:

> The priest, Apollonius (II), recorded this according to a command of the god. Our grandfather, Apollonius, an Egyptian from the priestly class, after bringing his god with him from Egypt, continued to do service (for his god) in accordance with tradition and purportedly lived to ninety-seven years of age… After Demetrios, I inherited the sacred images and was appointed to perform diligently the divine services… [t]he god imparted a revelation to me in a dream that a Sarapeion must be consecrated to him alone, and that he is no longer to be in rented rooms as before, and further, that he (Sarapis) will find a place where it (the temple) should be situated and will indicate the location with a sign. And this happened. For this was a place filled with manure, which had been publicly announced as being for sale on a poster displayed at the passageway to the market. Because the god desired it, a contract of purchase was agreed upon and the temple was erected within six months. Then some men ganged up against us and the god and laid a public charge against the temple and against me in court, with a penalty of either corporal punishment or a fine forthcoming. But the god had promised me in a dream that we would be victorious. And now that the legal proceedings have ended and we have won as is worthy of our god, we continue to praise the gods and give thanks. (*IG* XI/4 1299; 166 BCE)[37]

The Delian story, like other association narratives, has a dual concern for community and god. It speaks of events and tribulations in the history of the community, including their founder's travels from Egypt to Delos, the association's

37 This translation is partially adapted from B.H. McLean, 'The Place of Cult in Voluntary Associations and Christian Churches in Delos,' in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. Kloppenborg and Wilson) 186–225 (206).

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purchase of land, and some form of persecution that led to involvement with public courts. It also credits the association's god for inspiring the recording of these communal events, and for playing an instrumental role in all of the major events retold. The self-reflexive subject matter (i.e., *their* god, *their* community, and the intersection between the two) is typical of association narratives.

Syll^3 985 (I BCE) documents the beginnings of an association's history, describes the household where they held their meetings, and records some information about their identity—an inclusive group that consisted of male, female, freeborn, and slave members. The inscription, produced by a household association in Philadelphia (Lydia), begins as follows:

> Good fortune for you! For health and common salvation and the finest reputation, the ordinances, having been given to Dionysius while sleeping, were written up giving access into his own house to men and women, the free and slaves. For in this place altars were estabalished of Zeus Eumenes, and of Hestia his associate, and of other saviour Gods, and Eudaimonia, and Plutus, and Arete, and Hygieia, and Agathe Tyche, and Agathos Daimon, and Mneme, and the Charitae, and Nike. To this one (Dionysius), Zeus has given instructions to complete the purifications, the cleansings and the mysteries both according to ancestral customs and as it has now been written. (*Syll*^{3} 985.1–15)

Writing a narrative to document the details of the group's collective history was a common practice among associations. The details varied based on the context and concerns of the community. One association, a cult of Poseidon in Tralles, mentions their city's experience of an earthquake and credits their patron deity, Poseidon the 'earth-shaker', for their fortune (*ITralleis* 1; II or III CE). Another describes how their founder and first priest was chosen (αἱρετίσαντος) by their deity (*IG* II^2 1366; II or III CE). Divine dreams, oracles, and visions are regularly recorded as pivotal events in the history of associations.[38]

There exists one (and only one, to my knowledge) instance of an association's narrative being found on the premises of another association's property.[39] The narrative of a Sarapis association from Opus (*IG* X/2 255; I BCE) was discovered at the Sarapeion at Thessalonica.[40] Both cities are Achaean and in close proximity

38 Other examples include *IPriene* 139 no. 196 (350 BCE), *IEphesos* 24 (162/3 or 163/4 CE), and *SIG*^{3} 1044 (111 BCE). Strabo (*Geogr.* 17.1.17) states that records of divine acts, or aretalogies (ἀρεταί), were kept at a Sarapis temple near Alexandria.

39 However, Ascough has noted that a decree from a Bendis association at Piraeus was found with another Bendis association at Salamis (*IG* II^2 1317 [272/71 BCE]; 1317b [246/45 BCE]; and *SEG* II 10 [248/47 BCE]). See *Macedonian*, 94.

40 This building was constructed during the third century BCE and eventually housed at least 36 inscriptions. See C. Edson, 'Cults of Thessalonica (Macedonia III)', *HTR* 41 (1948) 105–204 (181); cf. K. P. Donfried, 'The Cults of Thessalonica and the Thessalonian Correspondence', *NTS* 31 (1985) 336–50 (337).

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to one another. Admittedly, this finding indicates that a story produced by one group was used by another neighbouring community. But the narrative remains explicitly and exclusively about the foundation of the association from Opus. Its usage by an outside group does not indicate that it speaks for all who read it. Rather, the story attends only to the history and concerns of the group that produced it. It is true that most association writings were written for the community that produced them, which confirms their narrow audience. But *IG* X/2 255 shows that a text could be primarily *about* one community and *used by* another.[41]

The usage of *IG* X/2 255 in Thessalonica should probably be explained by the fact that the Thessalonian Sarapeion is involved in the formation of the Opus association. The narrative reads as follows:

> ...it seemed in his sleep that Sarapis stood beside him and told him that after having arrived in Opus, he should carry a message to Eurynomos, son of Timasitheos, to receive him (Sarapis) and his sister Isis, and that he should deliver to him (Eurynomos) the letter under the pillow. And waking up, he (Xenainetos) marveled at the dream and yet he was at a loss about what he should do because he was a political rival to Eurynomos. But, falling asleep again and seeing the same things, when he awoke he found the letter under the pillow, just as it had been indicated to him. When he had returned (to Opus) he gave the letter to Eurynomos and reported the things that were decreed by the god. When Eurynomos received the letter and heard the things that Xenainetos said, he was at a loss because they were political rivals towards one another, as was made clear above. After having read the letter and having seen (that) the things that were written were in agreement with the things first having been said by him (Xenainetos) he (Eurynomos) received Sarapis and Isis. And after he provided hospitality in the house of Sosinike, she received them (the gods) into the household gods. Sosinike offered the sacrifices for some time... (*IG* X/2 255 [Kloppenborg and Ascough §77])[42]

A fragmentary account consisting of twenty-three extant lines, *IG* X/2 255 tells the story of a certain Xenainetos who travelled from Opus to the Thessalonian Sarapeion in order to consult the god. While sleeping (presumably in the Sarapeion), the god appeared to him twice to inform him that he must deliver to Eurynomos, his rival, the message that he is to establish a Sarapis cult in Opus. Eurynomos follows this instruction and establishes a cult in Opus. Like other association narratives, this story is at once about god and community.

Before reaching Thessalonica, this narrative was inscribed at Opus for its own community. It was later copied, possibly on papyrus, and brought to the Sarapis

41 This is a methodological point also suggested by T. Kazen in an article that draws insights into the gospel audience question from four non-canonical gospels. See 'Sectarian Gospels'.

42 Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Attica*.

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association in Thessalonica.[43] In Thessalonica, members of the association re-inscribed the story in the first or second century, and it is now extant in *IG* X/2 255.[44] The sharing of narratives among associations is possible but rare. Sharing narratives does not function, and is not intended, to halt the production of similar material by either association.

There are several extant narratives about founders that were seemingly written within Judean associations and directed towards narrow audiences—though they offer less information about communal writing practices than the previous examples. H. Najman shows that Judean groups began to write new stories about Moses in the Second Temple period as a result of rivalry among these communities for the correct interpretation of authoritative literature.[45] *Jubilees* is one example. This text was perhaps written by an Essene community in second-century BCE Palestine.[46] It reworks the narratives of Genesis and part of Exodus in order to insert legal significance into these stories, an addition that reflects some of the values of this community. The text records Moses to have transcribed from angelic dictation material that mirrored the legal and calendric beliefs of the community, as well as their visions concerning the present-time and future.[47]

43 For evidence of other inscriptions being copied, see *IMagnMai* 215 and *ISardh* 4. Cf. Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Attica*, 360–1.

44 P. Sellew, 'Religious Propaganda in Antiquity: A Case from the Sarapeum at Thessalonica', *Numina Aegaea* 3 (1980) 17–19.

45 H. Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (JSJSup 77; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 41–2.

46 See J. C. VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (HSM 14; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977) 214–85. For an updated and abridged version of this influential interpretation, see J. C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001) 17–20, 141–3.

47 See Najman, *Mosaic*, 63–6; J. L. Kugel, 'The Jubilees Apocalypse', *DSD* 1 (1994) 322–47. Another example of Mosaic Discourse, according to Najman, is Philo's *Life of Moses*, though not written within an association. This text has very different concerns from those of *Jubilees*. Some evidence suggests an intended audience of primarily Alexandrians: S. Sandmel posits that one of Philo's concerns was to prevent Judeans from leaving the Alexandrian Judean community as did Tiberius Julius Alexander, Philo's nephew (S. Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* [Oxford: Oxford University, 1979] 47; cf. Jos. *Ant.* 20.100); source-critical work indicates that Philo incorporated specifically Alexandrian material regarding Moses (P. Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria, an Exegete for his Time* [Leiden: Brill, 1997] 21; cf. *Mos.* 1.4); and Najman situates *De Vita Mosis* as a participant in an Alexandrian cultural debate: 'Philo's lives of Moses were…written to dispel false images of the hero—notably those disseminated by authors such as Manetho (third century B.C.E.) and Apion (a contemporary of Philo), who had contributed to anti-Judaism in Egypt' (Najman, *Mosaic*, 92). Philo does engage with Alexandrian traditions elsewhere, which speaks to the regionally specific content of some of his work. See Najman, *Mosaic*, 73; and J. M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1996) 114–83.

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Another narrative about a founder that was written within a Judean group is *Joseph and Aseneth*. G. Bohak has made a convincing case that *Joseph and Aseneth* was composed by a Judean community in Heliopolis sometime shortly after 145 BCE out of an interest to document the origins and legitimacy of their Egyptian landholding. Chapters 14–17 allegorically depict the founding of the Heliopolis temple, the cultic center of this association.[48] In a recent study, I have tried to show in some detail that a landholding controversy surrounding this community is further attested by Josephus and that Bohak's reconstruction is consistent with external data concerning the occupation of ownerless (ἀδέσποτος, see *Ant.* 13.62–73) land in the Hellenistic period.[49] This text was likely composed by the Judean community in Heliopolis and served the interests and values of the group that produced it.[50]

Whether it was an earthquake, legal issue, persecution, or revelation, association narratives were constructed to reflect these important events in the history of the community. Gospels, on the other hand, according to the 'all Christians' theory, cannot be read for social-historical information regarding the communities that produced and used them.[51] But if we situate the writing of the gospels within the context of associative practices of writing narratives in antiquity, then it is actually the rule rather than the exception that narratives

48 G. Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis* (SBLEJL 10; Atlanta: Scholars, 1996).

49 R. Last, 'Onias IV and the ἀδέσποτος ἱερός: Placing Antiquities 13.62-73 into the Context of Ptolemaic Land Tenure', *JSJ* 41 (2010) 494–516.

50 There are several other Judean texts composed within specific communities for specific communities. For example, critics (e.g. Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 27; and R. Charles, 'Hybridity and the Letter of Aristeas', *JSJ* 40 [2009] 242–59) commonly argue that the *Letter of Aristeas* was intended for a specifically Alexandrian audience, perhaps written in response to issues of cultural convergence in that city. However, the audience of the text is a much-debated issue: see M. Friedländer, *Geschichte der jüdischen Apologetik als Vorgeschichte des Christentums* (Zürick: Schmidt, 1903) 83–104; P. Dalbert, *Die Theologie der hellenistisch-jüdischen Missionsliteratur unter Ausschluss von Philo und Josephus* (Hamburg-Volksdorf: Reich, 1954) 92–102; V. Tcherikover, 'The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas', *HTR* 51 (1958) 59–85; and J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1996) 148–9. The sectarian scrolls of Qumran (e.g. *Damascus Document*, *Serek*, *Hodayot*, *Pesharim*) were also primarily intended for the communities in which they were written. There is debate whether there existed one or several sectarian settlements represented by the sectarian scrolls. For critics who argue that there existed several yahad settlements, the existence of copies of the *Serek* and the *Community Rule* that contradict one another is explained by their composition within different communities. See J. J. Collins, 'Tradition and Innovation in the Dead Sea Scrolls', *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Transmission of Traditions and Production of Texts* (ed. S. Metso, H. Najman, and E. Schuller; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 1–23 (4–5); and J. J. Collins, *Beyond the Qumran Community: The Sectarian Movement of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). In contrast, see G. Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Allan Lane, 1997) 26–48.

51 See the works in n. 2.

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should reflect the identity of the communities that produced them—regardless of how difficult it is to retrieve this information. Even if the gospels were meant to be biographies, their production in a community that mirrored social aspects of associative life would have affected the way that the Markan community, for example, intuitively thought of what they were doing while composing a narrative. Esler, who describes ancient society as 'group-oriented', interprets the data that redaction critics use for reconstructing gospel communities as examples of 'how effortlessly…a bios can be shaped in community-oriented ways'.[52] It is conceivable that Christ-groups composed customized narratives about Jesus that fit their own collective histories and identities. To speak of gospels as straightforward stories about Jesus requires an explanation that takes into account the significant level of interaction between Christ-groups and pagan forms of community.[53]

4. Bylaws and Honorary Decrees

In this section, two arguments will be put forward. First, the argument from the previous section that associations wrote out of self-interest will be continued. Despite the difference in content between bylaws and decrees on the one hand, and gospels on the other hand, what we are investigating is why communities took the time and incurred the expense to write. The hypothesis from the previous section that associations were primarily interested in themselves while writing is supported by the very nature of the non-narrative material that they wrote. Rather than documenting their collective histories, concerns, and identity as they did with narratives, when associations wrote bylaws and decrees they wrote for the betterment of the community. The common denominator is that when associations wrote they had themselves in mind, regardless of what type of document they were creating. Second, an analysis of the communal process behind making bylaws and decrees authoritative within communities shows that

52 Esler, 'Community and Gospel', 243.

53 There is evidence that the interaction between Christ-groups and associations was so strong that some Pauline groups (the Thessalonians and Corinthians) already existed as associations before Paul entered the scene. As this theory goes, upon arrival in these cities the apostle convinced the associations to change their patron deity to Christ. See R. S. Ascough, 'The Thessalonian Christian Community as a Professional Voluntary Association', *JBL* 119 (2000) 311–28; and B. L. Mack, 'Rereading the Christ Myth: Paul's Gospel and the Christ Cult Question', *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians* (ed. Cameron and Miller) 35–73 (51–2). R. Cameron and M. P. Miller speak more broadly about this phenomenon in the Jesus movement: 'If people are always already socially constituted by family, status, gender, city and region, ethnicity, a wide range of networks and associations, and the like, it is more plausible to imagine social formation in the name of Jesus or Christ as various kinds of interventions in other already existing groups, than to imagine these formations as arising *de novo*…' See 'Introducing Paul and the Corinthians', *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians* (ed. Cameron and Miller) 1–15 (8–9).

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associations wrote as groups rather than delegating the job to individuals who may or may not have represented the values and identity of the community as a whole.

4.1. *Bylaws and Decrees For Specific Communities*

It was in the interest of each community to compose its own regulations so that they could adequately account for the concerns and dynamics of its general membership. To be sure, associations wrote bylaws that shared clauses with other groups' bylaws. These include the common concern to regulate behaviour impacting the status of members: taking someone else's seat at banquets, bringing affiliates to court, and usage of abusive language.[54] However, it is the differences between bylaws that show a concern on behalf of associations to accommodate the particularities in their internal make-up when composing these documents. These differences could include levels of fines for disobedience, which had to be manageable and were determined by (and reflected) the socio-economic statuses represented by affiliates; or inclusion of special clauses that were less common among other groups. For example, in *IG* II² 1369 (II CE), affiliates who fight are subjected to one of two disciplinary punishments. There is a fine of twenty-five drachmae or, alternatively, physical retribution. The inclusion of physical punishment indicates that there were slaves in this association who paid with their bodies for misbehaviour.[55]

The twenty-five drachmae fine for freeborn members could reflect the level of concern this association had for fighting compared with other groups who charged different amounts for the same misdeed. Alternatively, it could reflect the socio-economic status of its freeborn members compared with that of other groups. Twenty-five drachmae is significantly more than the twenty-five 'light' drachmae (λεπτοῦ δραχμή) fine charged for fighting in at least one other association (e.g. *IG* II² 1368.80; 164/5 CE).[56] In yet another association, the fine for fighting is 10 drachmae for the initiator and five drachmae for any other party that was involved (*SEG* 31.122; early II CE). Whether these figures indicate different socio-economic membership profiles or varying concerns for fighting, they show how associations turned to writing, in this case, customized bylaws, out of a concern

54 See Kloppenborg, 'Greco-Roman', 209–13.

55 Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Attica*, 229–34.

56 On the light drachma: 'Since the denarius was by weight the effective equivalent of an Attic silver drachm, it is apparent that the Roman-era hemidrachm and drachm, called a "light" drachma, λεπτοῦ δρ(αχμή) in *IG* II² 1368…represented the traditional silver values of the hemiobol and obol and that at some point the bronze coins that would have ordinarily represented the hemiobol and obol were renamed hemidrachm and drachm'. J. H. Kroll, *The Greek Coins* (vol. 26 of *The Athenian Agora*; Athens: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1993) 84. Quoted from Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Attica*, 252. Kloppenborg and Harland (who co-wrote and co-edited §51 in *Attica*) note that the term is often used in Carian epigraphy.

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to account for and accommodate the distinctiveness of their general membership.[57]

Honorific decrees lead us into the competitive realm of associative life. Associations vied with each other for a place within civic hierarchies[58] and the limited resources of benefactors.[59] Associations sought to give themselves the edge in competition for benefactors over local associations by rewarding benefactors with honorific decrees. These inscriptions, highly valued by their honorees, functioned partially to honour benefactors and partially to let all potential benefactors know which associations would reward them for their services. Presumably, some associations did not reward patrons with decrees. Groups that honoured their benefactors could expect more generosity in the future than could less ambitious associations. Associations were quite forthcoming about the self-serving function of their decrees.[60] For example, the following text is from an honorary decree produced by an association in Piraeus for their supervisor in 190 BCE:

> *[I]n order, then, that the orgeōnes might be seen to have rendered thanks appropriate* to those who, at any time, have been ambitious [τοῖς φιλοτιμοθμένοις] (towards the association); for good fortune, be it resolved by the *orgeōnes* of Bendis and Deloptes and the other gods to commend Stephanos for the zeal that he has shown towards the *orgeōnes*... (*IG* II² 1324.11–20 [Kloppenborg and Ascough §32] italics mine)

Stephanos is being honoured for his φιλοτιμία, but the association is taking this as an opportunity to advertise its practice of giving benefactors what they want. They hope that potential future benefactors will take notice. Likewise, a different association, this one the *orgeōnes* of the Mother of the God, also in Piraeus, felt the need to make a similar claim about twelve years later:

> [I]t was approved [δεδόχθαι] by the *orgeōnes* members to commend Hermaios son of Hermogenes of Paionidai...*so that there might be a rivalry among the rest*

57 There are many examples such as these. To cite just one more, compare the 1,500 denarii fine enforced by a Macedonian association for disrupting a tomb (*Philippi* II 133/G441; II/III CE) and the 75,000 denarii fine enforced by a Judean association for a tomb violation (*IJO* I Mac 15; III CE).

58 See van Nijf, *Professional*, 131–243.

59 See Harland, *Dynamics*, 148–53.

60 Some were not as direct with their intentions. For example, a Judean association at Delos honoured their benefactor, Serapion, without explicitly referencing their concern for how this honorary act would make them look to other potential benefactors. On the other hand, the gift that they record to have been given to Serapion, a golden crown, is extravagant and probably caught the attention of others (*IJO* I, Ach67; 150–50 BCE). See A. Runesson, ed. with D. D. Binder and B. Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book* (AJEC 72; Leiden: Brill, 2008) 130–1.

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> *who aspire to honor* (φιλοτιμεῖσθαι), *knowing that they will receive thanks benefitting those who are benefactors of the association of orgeōnes*. (IG II² 1327.17–23 [Kloppenborg and Ascough §35] italics mine)

Associations that honour their benefactors with decrees are doing what they need to do in order to secure future acts of benefaction.

There is more to the self-interested production of communal writing. Translocal rivalries for prestige could lead to a preference for one's own writings. For example, after ratifying their legal statutes under their new priest, Claudius Herodes, and deciding to inscribe them, the Athenian Bacchic association shouts 'Now [we] are the best of all Bacchic societies (πάντων πρῶτοι τῶν βακχείων)' (*IG* II² 1368.26–27). 'Now', that is, after composing their own bylaw, this association is 'better' than the rest of its kind. This is an interesting equation; the Iobacchoi's bylaw afforded the group prestige. The competitive mentality of the Athenian Iobacchoi is fitting in an environment where groups view each other as rivals for prestige and where much of the motivation for joining a group in the first place was the enhanced status that it would bring to the affiliate. Evidence of the latter is everywhere in association writings.[61]

4.2. *The Collaborative Writing Process: Bylaws, Decrees, and Writing in General*

I have so far attempted to expose the self-interested nature of association writings. A second major characteristic of communal writing is collaboration. The process of composing an association bylaw exemplifies this practice well. Before group ordinances were actually written in final form, they customarily had to be agreed upon, read before the members, and approved.[62] The authorization process could be verbal (*IG* II² 1368), or it could involve members signing below a copy of the ordinances. The latter practice was followed by an Egyptian association, where members signed, εὐδοκῶ (*P.Mich*. V.243; I CE). The Athenian Iobacchoi describe their whole practice in an oft-cited inscription:

> [H]e (the vice-priest) read the statutes (drawn up by) the former priests Chrysippos and Dionysius, and after the priest and *archibacchos* and the president had approved, they (all) shouted: 'We will use these forever!' 'Bravo for the priest!' 'Revive the statues!' 'It is fitting for you (to do this)!' 'Health and good order to the Bakcheion!' '(Inscribe) the statutes on a stele!' 'Put the question!' The priest said, 'Since it is pleasing to me and to my fellow-priests and to all of you, as you ask, we shall put the question'. And the president

61 Kloppenborg and Ascough note: 'The fact that the most prominent activities of associations—at least as far as the epigraphical record is concerned—were the voting of honors for their members and the inscribing of membership lists suggests that beyond cultic engagements and the pleasures of drinking and dining, associations afforded their members with a sense of belonging, honor, and achievement'. See *Attica*, 6.

62 See *SEG* 31.122 (early II CE) for an exception.

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> Rufus son of Aphrodisios put the question: 'To whomever it seems good that the statutes that have been read out should be ratified [κύρια] and inscribed on a stele, raise (your) hand'. Everyone raised (their hand) (*IG* II² 1368.10–24 [Kloppenborg and Ascough §51]).[63]

In this text, the Greek word, κύρια, is used. This is the standard Greek term used in Greco-Egyptian contracts to indicate that a text has been made authoritative and binding. After the approval of the general membership, associations used this technical term to indicate the authority of the text. It is only after this process that the Iobacchoi's bylaws were deemed authoritative. The affiliates of a Zeus Hypsistos association attest to a similar standard in their bylaw stating that they made their law 'in common so that it should be authoritative' (*P. Lond.* 2193; I BCE). The approval process varied by association, but seems to have been a necessary and personalized event. After completing it, one association explicitly states that they will not ever do it again—the Athenian Bacchic society shouted the following regarding their bylaws: 'We will use these always!'

A similar phenomenon is found in associative practices of composing honorary decrees. Like bylaws, approval was often needed for the composition of decrees. For example, a certain Leukios proposed a motion to honour the founder of his association in Athens, but the enactment of the decree was decided by the will of the general membership: 'Those who vote in favour of making the decree [to honour the founder with crowns and a proclamation] authoritative (κύριον): sixty. Those who do not: none' (*IG* II² 1343.44–46; 37/6 or 36/5 BCE [Kloppenborg and Ascough §48]). This was a common practice. To provide just three more examples, an entire synagogue (συναγωγή) honoured three of their leaders (*IJO* 2.168; I CE), a *thiasos* from Athens honour their *archeranistēs* Sophron only after 'it seemed fitting to the association ([ἔδοξ]εν τῶι κοινῶι)' (*IG* II² 1297.2–3, 236/5 BCE [Kloppenborg and Ascough §24]); and likewise, another Athenian inscription reads 'it was approved (δεδόχθαι) by the *orgeōnes* members to commend Hermaios son of Hermogenes of Paionidai, and to crown him on account of the excellence and piety that he has shown to the gods and to the association…' (*IG* II² 1327.17–20, 178/7 BCE [Kloppenborg and Ascough §35]). This is one of many inscriptions wherein δεδόχθαι is used by an association to imply common consent. Associations produced honours, like regulations, as a group. These writings represent the will not only of individuals within the group, but of the entire association.

Associations were not the only writers in antiquity that composed in a collaborative manner. Despite Burridge's suggestion that gospels and biographies were the writings of individuals (within communities) who wrote without collaboration, it is unrealistic to think of any ancient narrative as having been written

63 J. S. Kloppenborg and P. A. Harland wrote and edited §51.

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exclusively by one author without input from others.[64] F. G. Downing shows that 'the audience had considerable control over the contents of what was being performed. Even when you were attempting to move your audience in some fresh direction, most of what you said had to be familiar, commonplace, echoing the present ideas and opinions of those listening'.[65] Writers conserved the preconceptions and biases of their intended audience.[66] Not only did the audience's expectations shape the writing of others, the audience also actively participated in the compositional process.

Before a work was published, authors put it through a pre-publication stage. This involved sending copies to friends or publicly performing a draft in front of a small crowd for feedback. The author would then revise their draft based on the feedback provided and later publish it. Downing notes that '[a] select part of the intended audience, an early smaller audience, may very well have been part of the production from the very start'.[67] T. Rajak speaks to this process while discussing Josephus's acknowledgment of those who helped him with his work.[68] Pliny the Younger also betrays that he made regular usage of proof-readers:

> First of all, I go through my work myself; next, I read it to two or three friends and send it to others for comment. If I have any doubts about their criticisms, I go over them again with one or two people, and finally I read the work to a larger audience; and that is the moment, believe me, when I make my severest corrections. (*Ep.* 7.17 [Radice, LCL])

Pliny further states that he is sure 'that any work must be revised more than once and read to a number of people' (*Ep.* 7.17 [Radice, LCL]). The ruling elite were not the only writers to use drafts. A Greek association inscribed a lengthy draft version of *IG* II² 1366 in *IG* II² 1365 (II/III CE), and there are also extant draft copies of contracts from Egypt that involve non-elite parties (e.g., *P. Mich.* XII 634, 25/25 CE; and *P. Mich.* V 340, 45–46 CE).[69]

Collaborative composition was the normal way of writing in the ancient world, which is in stark contrast to the anachronistic way some critics imagine textual production in the early Jesus movement. In his illuminating study on ancient authorship, Downing observed that we tend to picture the gospel-writers as individuals 'working in romantic isolation'—a nineteenth-century image.[70] We

64 Burridge, 'About People', 125–30.

65 F. G. Downing, 'Word-Processing in the Ancient World: The Social Production and Performance of Q', *JSNT* 64 (1996) 29–48 (32); cf. Aristotle *Rhet.* 1.5.1–6, 2; Cicero *De or.* 14.47.

66 Downing, 'Word-Processing', 33.

67 Downing, 'Word-Processing', 33.

68 T. Rajak, *Josephus* (London: Duckworth, 1983) 63.

69 Thanks to J. S. Kloppenborg for drawing my attention to the first of these.

70 Downing, 'Word-Processing', 34.

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imagine the role of the audience to be 'passively mirrored in the work, rather than in any way [an] active collaborator'.[71] Associative practices of writing bylaws, decrees, and narratives certainly indicate a merger between author and audience.

5. Summary of Association Data

Our investigation of association writings has betrayed two mannerisms that should affect the way we conceive how and to whom Christ-groups wrote gospels. First, the community's self-interest transcends generic boundaries and motivates the writing process. Narratives were written about the group and other material was written for the sake of the group. Second, communal writing, like gospel and biographical productions, was a collaborative project that, in the case of associations, reflected the identity, history, and values of the entire group. It would be irresponsible to suggest that gospel writers were somehow isolated from the input and collective interests of the group.

6. Gospel Narratives Reflecting Gospel Communities

The communal writing habits of associations are also discernible within Christ-groups. With regards to the practice of self-interested writing, several scholars have already argued that the gospels are about both Jesus and community, and that the evangelists' redactions reflect communal concerns.[72] R. Ascough's reading of Matthew fits particularly well with ancient conventions of communal composition for self-serving purposes. He argues that Matthew presents Peter as the Matthean community's founder and Christ as their divine hero who had given directives to their founder through divine revelation (16.17–19). Such a formula resembles that of the association narratives.[73] Other readings tend to note that the gospels focus particularly on the early history of their communities, which is a practice also found in association narratives. For example, J. Marcus believes that the Markan community had been persecuted and that they wrote this reality into their story of Jesus. Marcus cites Mark 10.30, noting that Mark adds 'with persecution' into a saying that previously did not include it.[74] This and other passages[75] indicate, for Marcus, that the community had experienced

71 Downing, 'Word-Processing', 34.

72 In addition to the literature on NT gospel communities, much scholarship has also been produced on the community behind Q. For an interesting recent review of, and methodological contribution to, reconstructions of the Q people, see S. E. Rollens, 'Does "Q" Have Any Representative Potential?', *MTSR* 23 (2011) 64–79.

73 Ascough, 'Matthew', 102–7.

74 Marcus, *Mark*, 28.

75 For example, prophecies of betrayal (13.12) and hatred 'by all' (13.13). See Marcus, *Mark*, 28–9.

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afflictions in their early history.[76] R. Brown suggests that before the Fourth Gospel was composed its community was expelled from Judean synagogues, an event that they wrote into their Jesus story (see 9.22; 16.2).[77] These are just two of several examples.[78]

Collaborative decision-making and composition are also identifiable within early Christ-groups. For example, Acts records the ruling on circumcision as a boundary-marker for the Jesus movement to have been a collaborative decision in the Jerusalem church. In Antioch, the issue was debated between Paul, Barnabas, and affiliates from the Judean association (15.1–2). Paul, Barnabas, and others (τινας ἄλλους ἐξ αὐτῶν) were then summoned to Jerusalem where they had further discussions with apostles and elders (15.2). There, they reported their successes to the general membership (15.4, 12) and were challenged by Pharisaic affiliates of the group (15.5).

Luke records James to have made the final decision, but his decision came after lengthy debate and was in agreement with Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and, presumably, everyone in the church except for the Pharisees. Such a democratic procedure resembles the decision-making process in *IG* II² 1368. In the letter delivered from Jerusalem to Antioch, the ruling is said to have been communal, which is consistent with the collaborative effort thus far articulated in this story (15.23–29). The collaborative nature of decision-making in the Judean Christ-group is affirmed when certain individuals were chosen 'with the consent of the whole church' to relay the news to Antioch (15.22).[79]

The Pauline letters, like the association writings, were also collaborative efforts, despite the fact that commentators commonly assume that Paul wrote his letters without much help.[80] We do not need to resort to inferences (such as the 'we' statements in some of his letters) to challenge such a notion. First Thessalonians begins as follows: 'Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of

76 Following F. Watson, Marcus notes that secrecy motifs, language of insiders and outsiders, and emphases on predestination (all found in Mark) 'are typical of groups that view themselves as persecuted'. Marcus, *Mark*, 29; cf. F. Watson, 'The Social Function of Mark's Secrecy Theme', *JSNT* 24 (1984) 49–69.

77 R. E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 23.

78 Some others include: Saldarini, *Christian-Jewish*, 1; J. D. Kingsbury, 'The Verb Akolouthein ("To Follow") as an Index of Matthew's View of his Community', *JBL* 97 (1978) 56–73; J. Riches, 'The Sociology of Matthew: Some Basic Questions Concerning its Relation to the Theology of the New Testament', *SBL 1983 Seminar Papers* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1983) 259–71; and W. A. Meeks, 'The Son of Man in Johannine Sectarianism', *The Interpretation of John* (ed. J. Ashton; Philadelphia: Fortress; London: SPCK, 1986) 173.

79 The unanimity of the decision is affirmed in 15.25.

80 L. Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 46; and C. A. Wanamaker, *The Epistle to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 68.

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the Thessalonians' (1.1). It is unlikely that Silvanus and Timothy were included in the greeting as a matter of courtesy, as is commonly assumed, since there is no evidence that awarding authorship to non-authors was done out of courtesy by ancient letter writers. Moreover, in Philemon Paul and Timothy are listed as authors (v. 1), but Paul's several other companions at the time (vv. 23–24) are not. If co-authors were listed by Paul out of courtesy, one would expect his other companions to be the beneficiaries of Paul's courtesy, as well.[81] The co-authored Pauline epistles are quite extraordinary in that co-authored letters are so rare in antiquity.[82]

Paul also betrays his usage of secretaries in four of his letters (1 Cor 16.21; Gal 6.11; Phlm 19; Rom 16.22). The involvement of a secretary in the final copy of a private letter ranged from transcription to full composition.[83] E. R. Richards argues that Paul's secretaries were somewhere in between:

> Unable to maintain the complete precision of verbatim transcription, the secretary took notes as complete and detailed as he could. He then prepared a rough draft, probably on washable papyrus sheets or stacks of wax tablets. Paul and his team heard the letter read and made corrections and additions… The process of editing and revising continued until Paul and his team were completely satisfied, since they, and especially Paul, had ultimate responsibility for every word of the letter.[84]

7. Eventual Distribution of Gospel Texts

If communal documents were composed by and for specific communities, how and why were the gospels accepted as authoritative in churches that did not compose them? There are very few data available to answer such questions. But, the gospels provide a few hints.

We can start with the 'how' question. The gospels, like association writings, were authored without attribution to their writer(s). Such a practice seems out of line with a goal of wide readership. Writings that were meant for, and obtained, fairly broad readership compensated their authors with 'a certain amount of literary reputation' (Pliny *Ep.* 7.20 [Radice, LCL]) and thus 'a great reward' (*Ep.* 2.10 [Radice, LCL]). With this objective in mind, writers intending to publish would want to ensure that their names were firmly associated with their works. Authors in Christ-groups and associations who intended the relevance of their

81 See E. R. Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004) 34.

82 None of the letters written by Seneca, Pliny, or Cicero were co-authored. There are only six examples from the private letters from Tebtunis, Zenon, and Oxyrhynchus: *P. Oxy.* 118, 1158, 3064, 3094, 3313 and 1167. See Richards, *Paul*, 34.

83 Richards, *Paul*, 59–93.

84 Richards, *Paul*, 93.

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work to be mostly limited to their own specific communities might not think realistic the possibility that these works would secure them a 'literary reputation'. If biographies were written with extensive feedback from the community and were meant specifically for that same community, there might be even less reason to tag them with authorship credits. So, how did anonymous texts meant for specific communities find readers beyond their churches? Their anonymity rules out the likelihood that they were distributed by their authors. The ancient publication process might be helpful for determining alternative methods of distribution.

Greek authors use ἔκδοσις for what we call publication. It literally means 'that which is given away'. In the ancient world, publication was 'a risky endeavour' given the lack of copyright regulations.[85] As mentioned above, a work was commonly put through a pre-publication stage that involved sending copies to friends or publicly performing a draft in front of a small crowd for feedback. The author would then revise the draft based on the feedback provided and later publish it. Sometimes texts would become available without the consent of their authors. Tertullian comments on pre-publication drafts of his own work leaking before its official release to the public (*Marc.* 1.1). Drafts written on wax or wooden tablets, or even on papyrus (*P. Mich.* XII 634) could be 'released' from their author's control by people who were within the author's trusted circle of collaborators. Considering (1) the imperfections of the ancient publication process; (2) the self-interested and collaborative practices of writing in associations and Christ-groups; and (3) the anonymity of the gospel literature and association writings, it is likely that the gospels, like association writings, were *intended* to remain at pre-publication status. Their authors (or their authors' co-workers) read them to fellow community affiliates, revised them according to the suggestions of the general membership, and then publicly performed them within the community as necessary. The gospels, like *IG* X/2 255, were not originally meant to be released from their community's control, or, in other words, published.[86]

Why one gospel would be accepted into an outside community is even more difficult to answer. But the phenomenon does not confirm the 'all Christians' theory. *IG* X/2 255 has already demonstrated that a communal document composed within and for one association could be accepted as authoritative within another. The difference between this case of cross-usage and that of the gospels is that the latter were not necessarily regarded favorably by the initial outside communities to come across them.

85 R. A. Derrenbacker Jr, *Ancient Compositional Practices and the Synoptic Problem* (BETL 186; Leuven: Leuven University, 2005), 40.

86 For details regarding pre-publication and publication standards, see Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 39–44.

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D. Sim has shown that Matthew and Luke were likely meant as rival gospels to Mark's narrative. Although Matthew uses 90% of Mark, the 10% deemed omissible made Mark non-authoritative and unnecessary in a Matthean community. Had the document been composed within Matthew's community, this 10% would never have made it to the final version of the text. Matthew's community regarded Mark's gospel as a failure due to its 'crude language, short length, offensive features and the fact that Mark was simply inadequate to meet the very needs of Matthew's own Jewish Christian community'.[87] Sim also argues that Matthew had reservations concerning Mark's 'patently Pauline perspective' in Mark's portrayal of Jesus' mission.[88] The result is that Matthew composed a new story of Jesus that 'corrected, expanded and updated the inadequate and incorrect Marcan account. Once he had done so, the Gospel of Mark simply had no role to play among Matthew's intended readership'.[89] Sim continues by arguing that Luke's and John's more liberal omissions from Mark betray even more serious objections to the text.[90]

Outside communities somehow gained access to Mark, but, as we would expect given communal practices of writing, these churches did not accept the foreign document as authoritative.[91] Sim's work is helpful for starting to think of the extended eventual readership of the gospels in a more nuanced manner.

8. Conclusions

On the first page of Bauckham's introduction to his *Gospels for all Christians* volume, he states, '[n]early all scholars writing about the Gospels now treat it as virtually self-evident that each evangelist addressed the specific

87 D. C. Sim, 'Matthew's Use of Mark: Did Matthew Intend to Supplement or to Replace his Primary Source?', *NTS* 57 (2011) 176–92 (178).

88 Sim, 'Matthew's Use of Mark', 178.

89 Sim, 'Matthew's Use of Mark', 178.

90 For Sim ('Matthew's Use of Mark', 189), 'Mark had no role at all to play in the Lucan community once Luke had composed and circulated his two-volume work. The earlier Gospel had been made redundant.' Regarding John's use of Mark (191): 'Why would he have been eager for them [i.e. the Johannine community] to consult the earliest Gospel after he himself had used it so sparingly, omitted much of it and replaced those traditions with very different material from independent sources?... John's transformation of Mark was so drastic and so complete in almost every respect that it is nigh on inconceivable that he believed that Mark could have made any meaningful contribution to his readers alongside his own Gospel narrative.'

91 If Sim's argument is deemed convincing—I think that it should be—then it further suggests a competitive element to the early Jesus movement. Some of the best evidence for an ideal of trans-local Christ-groups getting along with each other, working in unison, and sharing regular communication is seriously challenged by Sim's conclusions.

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context and concerns of his own community'.[92] While the present study has offered support for this assumption, several critics have recently voiced their approval of Bauckham's new paradigm. The result is that Christ-groups are increasingly portrayed as unique in relation to comparable communal models. Such an assumption has been criticized by J. Z. Smith for its bias and lack of methodological rigor.[93]

According to Esler the former consensus opinion was a matter of common sense: 'All the consensus [regarding the ability to reconstruct communities behind Gospels] requires is the socially realistic scenario—in a group-oriented society—of an evangelist closely linked with his local congregation and making sure his vision of the Gospel is related to their situation'.[94] There is now reason to suspect that communities, not just individual 'spokespersons', played an active role in the production of gospels, but Esler's observation is right. The association evidence supports the intuitions of many gospel scholars by demonstrating that communities in antiquity wrote collaboratively as a group in a manner that fostered self-reflexivity and self-interest, and that made general readership an uninteresting and impractical goal. Early Christ-groups operated by the same conventions. This was the normal practice of composing a document from within an association, and it created an obstacle to their acceptance as authoritative texts by general audiences.

92 R. Bauckham, 'Introduction', *The Gospels for All Christians* (ed. Bauckham) 1–7 (1).

93 J. Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990).

94 Esler, 'Community and Gospel', 240.

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