

Mending clothes and making wine: Multiple attestation for a gender doublet

Mt 9:14-17; Mk 2:18-22; Lk 5:33–39; G Thom 47

J Gertrud Tönsing
UNISA, South Africa
gertrud.tonsing@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9947-7321>

Abstract

The two short parables about mending clothes and making wine, found in the context of the debate about fasting, can be described as a “gender doublet”. There are many such doublets in the synoptic gospels where one of the parables brings an example from male experience and the other from female experience. This article will briefly summarize scholarly debates around such parable doublets and whether they can be seen to be part of the earliest (historical Jesus) tradition. This parable doublet is the one the most widely attested, being found as a doublet in all three synoptics and the gospel of Thomas. It is also an example of a doublet where the female example comes first in most versions, which could count against deliberate later compilation. The rest of the article focuses on the differences between the four versions of this parable doublet and argues that the likely original version is the one which is the most absurd and which is watered down in the other versions. An attempt is made to narrow down a probable original meaning.

1. Introduction

This article discusses a particular parable doublet in the synoptic gospels, which has to do with the incompatibility of the new and the old. One part of the doublet uses the example of patching clothes, the other of making wine. Such doublets occur throughout the synoptic gospels, and some can be called “gender doublets”, as one part of the doublet brings an example from “male” and the other from “female” reality. In some doublets, there is an unambiguous “gender” component, such as in the case of the “Lost sheep and Lost coin” doublet in Luke 15:4-10 or the “Mustard Seed and Leaven” doublet in Matthew and Luke (Mt 13:31–33 and Luke 13:18–

21). This article will argue that the “patches/wineskins” doublet too is a “gender doublet” and shows that Jesus was aware that he had both men and women in his audience. The question about whether a text could go back to the historical Jesus is hotly contested and some scholars argue that the doublets were constructed later. For this example some scholars accept historicity,¹ others accept it for the doublet but not for the context of the fasting debate in the synoptics.² “Multiple attestation” is seen as a possible pointer for historicity. In this case, there is multiple attestation as all three synoptics and the Gospel of Thomas carry this text as a parable doublet and the differences seem to show that there were independent traditions. In this article, I will argue that the breadth of attestation and the difficulty and even absurdity of some of the variations make it highly likely that this doublet was aimed at men and women in the audience of the historical Jesus.

2. Gender doublets

Parable doublets occur throughout the synoptic gospels, particularly concentrated in the double tradition (Q) and Special Luke. Sometimes one traditional stream carries only one part of the doublet (e.g. Matthew 18:12–14, Lost sheep or Mark 4:30–32, Mustard seed) and in other cases, the parts of the doublet are separated (e.g. G Thom 20 Mustard seed and G Thom 96 Leaven). In an earlier article, I argued that it is more likely that parable doublets became separated in transmission, often “losing” the feminine component³ than that later redactors compiled the doublets (as has been argued by some scholars)⁴ This discussion will be a test case for this argument as it is the most widely attested doublet, and all four sources bring both parts of the doublet.

1 L.T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 99.

2 Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, Hermeneia (Michigan: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 197.

3 [removed for peer review].

4 F Bovon, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas*, EKK 2. Auf (Neukirchen-Vlyn: Neukirchener / Patmos Verlag, 2008), 97; H Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, ed. D.A. Koch, Kritisch E (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 498.

There are disagreements between scholars as to what should be called a “gender doublet”, and in general which parables should be labelled doublets, or pairs. Various terms have been used. Arnal speaks of “doublets” sometimes of “couplets” or “gender pairs” or of “twinning” and defines them as “repetitious examples, statements or arguments, paired by gender: one male, one female (usually in that order).”⁵ Kloppenborg and Batten speak of “gender pairs”.⁶ Jacobsen speaks of “twinning” in both Q and Luke but includes more than just parables.⁷ Similarly, Seim includes paired narratives in what she calls “gender pairs”.⁸ The example in this article is a pair of short parables where two different examples are meant to illustrate the same truth. There are many such examples in the synoptic gospels, both gendered and non-gendered, which are listed in my previous article.⁹

“Gender pairs” or “gender doublets” are examples where one example in the pair comes from “male” and the other from “female” reality. There is of course debate about what constitutes these differences. Some doublets name male and female actors, others are more ambiguous, and one needs to ask about the reality that lies behind it. The ambiguity speaks against a deliberate compilation of gender doublets, as compilation would imply a purpose that would have probably been made more obvious¹⁰ Do we find examples in the parables that seem to appeal to women? Were there fixed gender roles in Palestine peasant society? There is no general agreement for example, that the double parable about the birds and the lilies Matthew 6:26,28b–30 and Luke 12:24,27–28 is a gender doublet¹¹ even though it is

5 William E Arnal, Gendered Couplets in Q and Legal Formulations: From the Rhetoric to Social Source, *JBL* 116, no. 1 (2019): 77.

6 John S Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 97; Alicia Batten, More queries for q: women and Christian origins, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 24(1994):47.

7 A. D. Jacobsen, *The First Gospel – An Introduction to Q* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1992), 227.

8 Turid Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message – Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 15.

9 [removed for peer review].

10 [removed for peer review].

11 D T Roth, *The Parables in Q* (London: T & T Clarke International, 2018), 201.

likely that sowing was generally done by men and spinning and weaving by women in Palestine in the time of Jesus.

The doublet discussed in this article is also in dispute as to whether it is a genuine gender doublet. Kee speaks about the village tailor hearing this parable, so does not see this as aimed at women.¹² However, as has been argued by Perkins, it is unlikely that people who could afford tailors would have mended old clothes. If this reflects the situation of the poor and not the rich, mending would most likely have been women's work, making this a genuine gender doublet.¹³

3. The debates around the “historical Jesus” material

This section will only briefly summarize the many debates that surround the question of attributing something to the historical Jesus. I have more extensively covered this in a previous article.¹⁴ The fact is, there is no single criterion that could prove beyond doubt that something goes back to the historical Jesus. We do not have direct access to what Jesus said, only mediated through the faith memory of the church. Dunn pointed out: “We cannot find a Jesus who did not make an impression or arouse faith in listeners”.¹⁵ We cannot speak of “proof” but only of greater or lesser plausibility. In this controversy, I follow Theissen and Winter who argue that a decisive criterion for “authenticity” is “contextual plausibility in tandem with the plausibility of later effects”.¹⁶ A convincing argument must be made that it is more likely that this material goes back to Jesus rather than to the background of first-century Palestine or the early church, and there should be a way to explain the variations and traditions that are available at present.

12 Alistair Kee, *The Old Coat and the New Wine: A Parable of Repentance*, *Novum Testamentum* 12(1970):20.

13 M-A. Beavis, *The Lost Coin – Parables of Women, Work and Wisdom* (London-New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 129–30.

14 [removed for peer review].

15 James D G Dunn, *A New Perspective of Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 29.

16 Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus* (Louisville, London: John Knox Press, 2002), xv.

Meier speaks of five criteria for ascertaining what can be attributed to the historical Jesus. Each of these criteria has been critiqued. The Criterion of “Embarrassment”¹⁷ gives a mark of authenticity to those parts of the tradition which would have made the early church uncomfortable. Similarly, the criterion of “discontinuity” or “dissimilarity”¹⁸ sees the authentic Jesus tradition in those utterances which are different from what one would expect within either a Jewish first-century setting or a post-Easter early church setting. This has been critiqued for giving us “a Jesus cut off from both his Jewish predecessors and his Christian followers”¹⁹ and can tend to be anti-Jewish. It also subjectively depends on the present researchers’ limited understanding of these contexts and what is or what is not imaginable in the context for readers.²⁰ However, as a criterion that is not seen as “proof” but increases “plausibility” both are still useful in the historical Jesus debate. Of course, the term “plausibility” can be just as easily critiqued as being subjective, as Becker does²¹ and this is why it is necessary to use all the criteria in tandem and to admit that we are always making deductions based on our prejudices, religious assumption and biases. Nevertheless, arguments can be judged as better or weaker.

The next criterion Meier discusses is “Multiple attestation.”²² This is the most “objective” criterion, but is also based on certain assumptions²³ Did Mark know or even use “Q”? Is the Gospel of Thomas based on an

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- 17 John P. Meier, Criteria: How Do We Decide What Comes from Jesus? In *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research*, ed. James D G Dunn and Scot McKnight (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 126.
- 18 Meier, Criteria: How Do We Decide What Comes from Jesus? 129.
- 19 Dale Allison, How to Marginalize the Traditional Criteria of Authenticity, in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus Vol 1*, ed. Tom Holmen and Stanley Porter (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 5.
- 20 Stanley E Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research* (New York: T & T Clarke International, 2000), 74.
- 21 Jürgen Becker, The Search for Jesus’ Special Profile, in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus Vol 1*, ed. Tom Holmen and Stanley Porter (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 85.
- 22 Meier, Criteria: How Do We Decide What Comes from Jesus? 132.
- 23 Andries Van Aarde, Methods and Models in the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Historical Criticism and/or Social-Scientific Criticism, *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 58, no. 2 (2002): 429, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v58i2.562>.

independent tradition or dependent on the Synoptics? Is John independent of the Synoptics?

In the case of this parable, there seem to be three separate tradition streams: Mark (followed closely by Matthew), Special Luke and the Gospel of Thomas. Were these separate and independent traditions or did Luke or Thomas change the Markan tradition? The plausibility of the different scenarios needs to be argued case by case. In this case: Is it more “plausible” that Luke changed the tradition or that he had access to an independent tradition? Is it plausible that it was Mark who changed the original? Is it plausible that the Gospel of Thomas version is an adaptation from the synoptic version, or is it likely to be based on an independent tradition stream?

The Fourth Criterion in Meier depends on the first three. It is the criterion of “Coherence”.²⁴ A tradition which is neither dissimilar nor embarrassing for the early church and is attested in only one tradition stream can still be seen as coming from the historical Jesus if it is “coherent” with what is known from other better-attested traditions. Even in this well-attested double parable, one can look at how this specific tradition compares with other teachings and whether there is coherence. This can play a role in increasing “plausibility”.

The last criterion is the one of “rejection and execution”,²⁵ and asserts that the picture of the historical Jesus which emerges from the various criteria, must explain why Jesus infuriated people so much that he was in the end put to death. This is not a criterion that is always relevant but should still be part of the issues of consideration.

The second part of the Theissen and Winter criterion is “plausibility of later effects”. This would entail looking at different versions and trying to determine how the different versions could have arisen. The version which is most likely to explain why the others came about is the one most likely to be the original. It is important to note, however, that this does not make the other versions “inauthentic”, as they served a purpose in their changed context.

24 Meier, *Criteria: How Do We Decide What Comes from Jesus?* 134.

25 Meier, *Criteria: How Do We Decide What Comes from Jesus?* 136.

In the previous article, I argued that gender doublets are most easily explained as flowing naturally from the preaching of the historical Jesus. Various scholars have argued that they were compiled later by either Luke²⁶ or the redactor of Q.²⁷ However in that article, it was shown that gender doublets are attested far beyond just these two sources, being found in Mark, Thomas, Special Luke and perhaps even specially Matthew.²⁸ The gender doublet discussed in this article is attested beyond Luke and Q. If indeed Gender doublets were an innovation by the redactor of Q as argued by Kloppenborg,²⁹ then one would need to determine that both Mark and Thomas are dependent on Q. While there are many scholars who argue that Thomas is dependent on the Synoptics (see later discussion), there are fewer who argue that Mark used Q.³⁰

In the case of this parable doublet, there is a spread of evidence, “multiple attestation” which speaks for authenticity. Whether there is coherence will need to be argued. It will be argued that the “plausibility” that they are original is heightened by their irregularity and ambiguity. In this case, the unusual fact is that the female example is first in three of the four sources.

4. The sources for the “mending clothes and making wine” gender doublet

There are close parallels between all four sources for this double parable. There are also interesting differences which raise questions about how these could have come about. This discussion assumes the common theory that Mark was the first of the synoptic gospels and Matthew and Luke are dependent on Mark and have another common source, “Q”.³¹ The question

26 Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1978), 306; David. I Balch, Luke, in *Eerdmans' Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 1137.

27 Roth, *The Parables in Q*, 201.

28 [removed for peer review].

29 Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 97.

30 Harry T Fleddermann, *Q-A Reconstruction and Commentary* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 180–83.

31 This article uses “Q” as shorthand for the tradition shared by Matthew and Luke. This does not necessarily refer to a particular reconstructed version of Q as for example

of whether Thomas is independent of the Synoptics will be kept open and discussed below, but in this case, independence seems more likely.

4.1. Mark

The double parable is set in the context of the debate on fasting. The question is raised by unnamed people about the fasting practice of the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees. Jesus answers with the example that wedding guests do not fast if the bridegroom is with them. When he is taken away, they will fast ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ (on that day). This might reflect the later Christian practice of fasting on Fridays.³² The double parable is then narrated with the female example first. It speaks of sewing a piece of ῥάκους ἀγνάφου (unshrunk cloth) onto an old garment. When washing, the patch would shrink and pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. New wine when poured into old, brittle animal skins would when fermenting, burst the skins and spill.³³ Both the old skins and the new wine would be destroyed.

4.2. Matthew

Matthew follows Mark very closely with only minor differences. It is the disciples of John who speak to Jesus and he includes the Pharisees but not their disciples as Pharisees did not “technically have disciples”.³⁴ He also agrees in the NRSV with Luke in referring to “fasting often”, though major ancient manuscripts leave out πολλά, There are two other minor agreements with Luke, as both leave out the statement about the fast in 18a and the duplication of the statement about the bridegroom in 19b.³⁵ Matthew says of the wedding guests that they πενθεῖν (to mourn), adding in an interpretation of fasting practice. The bridegroom will be taken away καὶ τότε (and then) they will fast. In the double parable itself, Matthew

proposed by the editors of the *Critical Edition of Q* (Robinson, Hoffmann and Kloppenborg 2000).

32 Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium Des Markus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 59.

33 W Carter, *Matthew and the Margins* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 222.

34 Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 136.

35 Rainer Riesner, The Question of the Baptists’ Disciples on Fasting (Mt 9:14–17; Mk 2:18–22; Lk 5:33–39)1, in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus Vol 4*, ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 3306.

follows Mark very closely, using the “unshrunk cloth” terminology. After the wineskins example, he adds the words καὶ ἀμφοτέροι συντηροῦνται (and so both are preserved) (v 17).

4.3. Luke

Although Luke had access to Mark, he brought a substantially different version of the double parable and so the question is raised whether Luke changes Mark or whether he had access to an independent tradition. The probabilities will be discussed below. Luke follows Mark in speaking of unnamed people asking about the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees. He follows Mark closely in the example about the bridegroom but then speaks of fasting ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις (in those days) when the bridegroom is taken, rather than “on that day”. It is in the first of the double parables that Luke departs substantially from Mark. He uses the example: Οὐδείς ἐπίβλημα ἀπὸ ἱματίου καινοῦ σχίσας ἐπιβάλλει ἐπὶ ἱμάτιον παλαιόν (No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment) instead of speaking of a patch of unshrunk cloth. The damage to the new garment is at the centre, not the damage to the old.³⁶ He also adds the verse about the old wine being preferred, Ὁ παλαιὸς χρηστός ἐστιν. (the old is good) which is surprising in the context.

4.4. Gospel of Thomas

The Gospel of Thomas brings the double parable not in the context of the fasting debate, even though the document does have a parallel to the bridegroom verse. This version shows the incompatibility of new and old but does not necessarily weigh them. It brings different examples of where people need to make choices. He also brings the example of the preference for the old, even if not spelt out, and this introduces the double parable which is narrated in inverse order from the synoptics, that is, with the “male” example first. The “mending clothes” parable is different from all the Synoptics in that the example is of an old patch sewn onto a new garment. It is not explained why an old patch would tear a new garment.

There is no unanimity in the question of whether the Gospel of Thomas is dependent on the synoptics or not. Some place the entire gospel early, in

36 M Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, Handbuch z (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 231.

a similar time as the early saying collection Q³⁷ Others place it late, after the synoptic gospels,³⁸ and some say the compilation was late, but it follows an early, independent tradition.³⁹ Patterson argues for a differentiated use of Thomas to test each tradition, and states, that to posit an independent tradition behind Thomas is a “useful working hypothesis”.⁴⁰

In the case of the parable of the Mustard Seed, one could argue that the Gospel of Thomas harmonizes the differing versions of the synoptic gospels and thus would be late. The mustard seed is sown in the field (Matthew), on the earth (Mark) and in the garden (Luke). One could argue, as I did in a previous article that Thomas knew all these variations and harmonizes it to “on cultivated soil” (G Thom 20).⁴¹ In the case of the “Patches and Wineskins” parable however, it seems more likely that it is based on its oral version, as there is no attempt to accommodate the synoptic versions. Even if the compilation was late and the redactor knew the synoptics, in this case, they do not seem to be authoritative enough for G Thom to change anything. Wiefel argues the version in Thomas is based on Luke,⁴² but Thomas turns it on its head, so does not seem to see Luke as authoritative. Wiefel does not give a convincing reason for Thomas’ change. In this case, it seems that the Gospel of Thomas does have access to an independent oral tradition. Montefiore argues that Thomas’ version is the most original as it follows most closely Hebrew Parallelism.⁴³ The question of originality will be discussed in detail below.

37 Stevan L. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 3; Reinhard Nordsieck, *Das Thomasevangelium* (Neukirchen-Vly: Neukirchener Verlag, 2006), 21.

38 Becker, “The Search for Jesus’ Special Profile,” 60.

39 April D Deconick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas In Translation* (London: T & T Clarke International, 2006), 8.

40 Stephen J Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1993), 223.

41 [removed for peer review]

42 Wolfgang Wiefel, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1988), 122.

43 Quoted in Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, 6.

5. The texts

Matthew 9:14–17	Mark 2:18–22	Luke 5:33–39	G Thom [104] 47
<p>¹⁴Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” ¹⁵And Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. ¹⁶No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. ¹⁷Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved. (NRSV)</p>	<p>¹⁸Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and people came and said to him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” ¹⁹Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. ²¹“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. ²²And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.” (NRSV)</p>	<p>³³Then they said to him, “John’s disciples, like the disciples of the Pharisees, frequently fast and pray, but your disciples eat and drink.” ³⁴Jesus said to them, “You cannot make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?” ³⁵The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.” ³⁶He also told them a parable: “No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise the new will be torn, and the piece from the new will not match the old. ³⁷And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. Ruined. ³⁸But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. ³⁹And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, “The old is good.” (NRSV)</p>	<p>¹⁰⁴ (A) They said to Jesus, “Come, let us pray today, and let us fast.”</p> <p>(B) Jesus said, “What sin have I committed, or how have I been undone? (C) Rather, when the bridegroom leaves the bridal suite, then let people fast and pray.”</p> <p>(47.1) “It is impossible for a person to mount two horses and to stretch two bows. (2) And it is impossible for a servant to serve two masters. Else he will honor the one and insult the other.</p> <p>(3) No person drinks old wine and immediately desires to drink new wine.</p> <p>(4) And new wine is not put into old wineskins, so that they do not burst; nor is old wine put into (a) new wineskin, so that it does not spoil it.</p> <p>(5) An old patch is not sewn onto a new garment, because a tear will result.”</p>

<p>¹⁴Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” ¹⁵And Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. ¹⁶No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. ¹⁷Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved. (NRSV)</p>	<p>¹⁸Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and people came and said to him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” ¹⁹Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰<i>The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.</i> ²¹“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. ²²And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.” (NRSV)</p>	<p>³³Then they said to him, “John’s disciples, like the disciples of the Pharisees, frequently fast and pray, but your disciples eat and drink.” ³⁴Jesus said to them, “You cannot make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?” ³⁵<i>The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.</i>” ³⁶He also told them a parable: “No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise the new will be torn, and the piece from the new will not match the old. ³⁷And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. Ruined. ³⁸But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. ³⁹And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, “The old is good.”” (NRSV)</p>	<p>¹⁰⁴ (A) They said to Jesus, “Come, let us pray today, and let us fast.” (B) Jesus said, “What sin have I committed, or how have I been undone?” (C) Rather, when the bridegroom leaves the bridal suite, then let people fast and pray.” (47.1) “It is impossible for a person to mount two horses and to stretch two bows. (2) And it is impossible for a servant to serve two masters. Else he will honor the one and insult the other. (3) No person drinks old wine and immediately desires to drink new wine. (4) And new wine is not put into old wineskins, so that they do not burst; nor is old wine put into (a) new wineskin, so that it does not spoil it. (5) An old patch is not sewn onto a new garment, because a tear will result.”⁴⁴</p>
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44 Patterson Stephen J. and Robinson James M., “The Gospel of Thomas. Translation, n.d. [Online]. Available: <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/bible-versions-and->

6. The differences

6.1. Context

Matthew and Luke follow Mark in placing this parable in the context of the debate around fasting. The Gospel of Thomas, which usually brings parables separately without a narrative context has in this chapter a string of examples. These examples all point to the need to make choices, but do not necessarily weigh one or the other as better. A parallel exists in G Thom to the image of the bridegroom. While it is not linked with this parable this would be a strong pointer to historical tradition.

In the Synoptics, the celebratory practice of Jesus is contrasted with the austere praxis of the Pharisees and disciples of John, which Matthew interprets as a sign of “mourning”. Originally this controversy was probably with the followers of John (see later argument). Mark builds it into a sequence of controversies with the Pharisees.⁴⁵ Even groups with strict regular fasting traditions would suspend the fast for a wedding or community celebration. Fasting on festival days was not accepted.⁴⁶ All three versions open the possibility for a fasting practice at other times, after the departure of the bridegroom. This might be a redactional addition.⁴⁷ The short version in G Thom 104 could be close to the original. Implied in all contexts is not a critique of fasting as such, but an argument for the need to make choices and not to destroy the new and the old by trying to force them together.

The parables fit the context well as Jesus’ way of ministering to people would have been destroyed by a regular fasting practice, and it fits in with other texts where Jesus mentions people calling him a “drunkard and glutton” (Mt 11:19, Lk 7:34). These fit the “embarrassment” criterion and show that his religious praxis was out of step with what was the normal expectation of pious behaviour. The controversy is a plausible setting for the double parable. It thus also meets the criterion of “Coherence”.

translations/the-gospel-of-thomas-114-sayings-of-jesus/.

45 Stein, *Mark*, 136.

46 Grundmann, *Das Evangelium Nach Markus*, 87.

47 Stein, *Mark*, 134.

6.2. The order

In all three Synoptics, the “female” example comes first in this double parable, if this is indeed speaking of poor women mending clothes. It is only in the Gospel of Thomas that this is turned around. The Gospel of Thomas includes all three elements from Luke, but in reverse order and with significant changes. Montefiore argues that G Thom has the most original version.⁴⁸ If this was true it would have meant that Mark changed both the order and the content and that Luke changed them again to be different from both sources he had access to. This is not impossible, but a simpler explanation would be that either Thomas or oral tradition changes the order to the more traditional “male first” order. Then placing the issue of the old and new wine first also makes sense. While these different scenarios are all possible, the more “plausible” one is that the synoptic order is original.

6.3. Unshrunk cloth or tearing patch out of a new garment

Luke speaks of actively destroying a new garment so as to tear out a patch to fix the old garment. This is absurd, and it is true, no one would do it. Did Luke change Mark to be more absurd, or did Mark smooth out the absurd example to make it simply an “unshrunk cloth”? Some scholars give Mark priority as it is older and say Luke rewrites the parable⁴⁹ and adds the new garment to “heighten the folly”.⁵⁰ What could have been a reason for Luke to change a simple example into a completely absurd one? We know that there are other synoptic examples of Jesus bringing absurd examples in his parables, which are for that reason highly memorable, for example the speck and plank in the eye (Mt 7:3–5 and Lk 6:41–42) or lighting a lamp and hiding it under a basket (Mt 5:15, Lk 11:33). It is likely here that Mark made the change to make the example less absurd, perhaps to avoid the “embarrassment” effect. The fact that Thomas also speaks about the “new garment” makes it more likely that Luke is original, though Thomas also makes it less absurd by sewing an old patch on a new garment. It is not

48 Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*, 3.

49 C.F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (London, Philadelphia: SCM Press, Trinity International, 1993), 312.

50 F Bovon, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas*, EKK 2. Auf (Neukirchen-Vlyn: Neukirchener / Patmos Verlag, 2008), 262.

made clear why a new garment would need to be fixed and why sewing an old patch onto it would result in a tear. The example does not work. Davies argues that it was an early scribal error and should have read, “new patch on old”,⁵¹ but this is conjecture. Again, to argue that the Thomas version is the earliest and the others depend on it would be to argue that Luke does not try to harmonize his two sources but changes them both into something entirely different. It is more likely that the most absurd and most memorable example is original, and less likely that it was invented by Luke.⁵²

Of the synoptic gospels, the Lukan example fits in best with the context of the fasting debate. For Jesus to stop his practice of celebratory meals with outcasts in favour of regular fasting would be to destroy the new garment to patch up the old. Using a piece of unshrunk cloth might not fix the old, but it is not destroying the new as happens in both examples of the double parable in Luke. The Thomas version would make sense in the context of the fasting debate if people felt that Christians fasting is like placing an old patch on a new garment, and it could have been inverted for that reason in oral tradition. It makes less sense in the Thomas context of incompatible choices. This is another indication that the fasting context could be original.

6.4. A true doublet?

If the parables are a true doublet, it would mean that both parts illustrate the same truth. This is clearest in the version of Luke where something new that is valuable gets destroyed in both cases. The unshrunk patch might not have fixed the old garment but is likely to still be usable after it has shrunk to patch something else. Wiefel argues that Luke has changed one part of the double parallel to refine it into a true doublet,⁵³ but it seems more likely that Jesus himself told a true doublet. The version in Mark and Matthew is not as effectively parallel. One could argue that the Lukan version is not a true doublet as the first half is more absurd than the second, but in a wine-harvesting society risking losing your precious wine because you want to

51 S Davies and K Johnson, Mark’s Use of the Gospel of Thomas (Part Two), *Neotestamentica* 31, no. 2 (1997): 6.

52 Frédéric Godet, *Kommentar Zu Dem Evangelium Des Lukas* (Giessen/Basel: Brunnen Verlag, n.d.), 205.

53 Wiefel, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas*, 121.

reuse the old and brittle wineskins of the previous year might be just as absurd.

The version in Thomas keeps the doublet together (unlike the separation of mustard seed and leaven), but it is no longer a true doublet as in the case of the wineskins the case is argued both ways that putting old with new will harm both, but in the case of the patch parable only “old on new” is mentioned. The element of choice between two options, which is the context in G Thom is not maintained by the last part of the double parable.

6.5. The old is good

Some commentators argue that the sentence about the old wine being preferred was added by the historian Luke.⁵⁴ Luke, as a historian was trying to make clear that Jesus was not intent on destroying the “Old”, even though it sometimes seemed like it.⁵⁵ Luke was intent in his entire gospel to show that Jesus was the fulfilment of the “Old” covenant and in continuity with the Jewish prophets.⁵⁶ This makes this sentence Lukan. If this sentence was only found in Luke, this would have been a plausible argument. However, the fact that it is also found in G Thom makes this less likely, as it is hard to argue that Thomas has a special interest in the value of history. Klein argues that for Luke fasting was the “new” practice and that having table fellowship was the old practice that should not be destroyed,⁵⁷ but this does not make sense in the context of a long Jewish practice of fasts, even if they were not all as regular and strict as those of John and the Pharisees. Fasting was prescribed on the Day of Atonement.⁵⁸ Fitzmyer comments on the irony that a saying which could be seen as supporting the rejection of Jesus’ preaching is used in this context.⁵⁹

54 Walter. Schmithals, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1980), 74.

55 David. L Balch, Luke, in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 1115.

56 Mineko Honda, Luke 5:39 – What Are the Old Wine and the New Wine Mentioned Here? [Online]. Available: <https://Core.Ac.Uk/Download/Pdf/229750848.Pdf>, 2018, 39.

57 Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 228.

58 Eduard Schweizer, *Das Evangelium Nach Markus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 37.

59 Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke 1-9* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1970), 602.

As this sentence is attested in more than one source, it is more likely that it was left out by Mark, as it is a puzzling sentence in a context where the New brought by Jesus must have been seen as superior to the Old, practised by John and the Pharisees. Indeed, it is also left out in some manuscripts of Luke,⁶⁰ notably by Marcion.⁶¹ In G Thom 47, the superiority of the old wine is implied, not directly stated, and this stands directly after other sentences which imply that a choice must be made between two options. In the other case, there is no weighting of the options. This sentence acknowledges the attraction of the old, which must have been strong even among the followers of Jesus⁶² and makes it clear, that the different practices do not devalue the old. Jeffrey suggests: “Perhaps he is just saying that he understands their resistance to change.”⁶³ This sentence makes most sense if it was said with the disciples of John in mind, as John was seen as an important representative of the old faith and was respected by Jesus and the early church. It is quite possible that originally this was a controversy with the followers of John, as argued by Rengstorff⁶⁴ and that it was Mark who placed it into a context where the controversy included the Pharisees.⁶⁵ This suggestion is supported by the fact, that it is unclear as to who Jesus is speaking to.⁶⁶ Mark says καὶ ἔρχονται καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ (and [they] came and said to him) In Matthew it is clearly the disciples of John who come to him: ἔρχονται αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ Ἰωάννου even though he includes the Pharisees. Luke also leaves it open. Οἱ δὲ εἶπαν πρὸς αὐτόν·(and [they] said to him). The implied “they” seems to point to the Pharisees from the previous passage, but those who address Jesus speak of the “disciples of the Pharisees” in the third person. Matthew is likely closest to the original situation here,⁶⁷ and that the sentence about the “old

60 G.H.P Thompson, *Luke* (Oxford: University Press, 1972), 105.

61 Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 250.

62 F B Craddock, *Luke – Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 80.

63 David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), 85.

64 Rengstorff, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 80.

65 Schweizer, *Das Evangelium Nach Markus*, 36.

66 R S Good, Jesus, Protagonist of the Old, in Lk 5:33–39,” *Novum Testamentum* 25 (1983): 21.

67 Wiefel, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas*, 121.

wine” is an acknowledgement of the continued attractiveness of John the Baptist’s message, long after his death.

7. Lukan priority

In my previous article on the mustard seed and the leaven, I argued that Luke stays closer to his sources where they disagree with Mark, and closer to Q than Matthew. In effect, this means the Lukan version should be given priority. This seems to be the case in this example also. Luke has the most absurd example and the clearest doublet. If Jesus told the two examples together, they must be effective illustrations of the same point. The sentence about the old wine being good is a “difficult reading”, more likely to have been left out by Mark than added by Luke and has another witness in the Gospel of Thomas. While it is likely that Thomas had access to an independent version, it is unlikely to be the earliest tradition as it would be more difficult to explain how the other readings came about from the version in the gospel of Thomas. There are many examples of gender doublets in various tradition streams and the majority follow the pattern that the male example is first. This would have been likely if it had been deliberately compiled. It is easily imaginable that in oral tradition this pair would have also reversed its order in some communities.

It seems likely therefore that Luke’s special tradition carries the most original version of the double parable, set in the context of the fasting debate. This counts against the theory that the doublets were an innovation of the redactor of Q.

8. Possible meaning of the patches-wineskins parable

The version of the double parable in Luke fits the context so well that it is likely that this was the original context of the parable, rather than having been brought together later as Rengstorf argues.⁶⁸ If Jesus and his disciples had tried to superimpose a regular strict fast upon Jesus’ practice of having celebratory fellowship together with people to demonstrate the love of God for them, this would have destroyed the new practice without necessarily

68 Rengstorf, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas*, 80.

saving the old. Here John and his disciples with their strict ascetic discipline were part of an old order, which Jesus does not reject, but which is clearly different from his. The last sentence could be an acknowledgement, that Jesus recognizes that people are likely to hold on to their traditional practices – which is indeed what happened in the early church. By the time Luke wrote, likely, fasting was routinely practised by Christians.

For contemporary Christians the double parable is relevant in that when new things begin, they need new and flexible structures so that they will not be immediately stifled. Sometimes the new needs time to develop alongside the old, without trying to force the two together in a way that could destroy both.

9. Conclusion

This article has argued that there were three distinct tradition streams in the development of the double parable “Patches and Wineskins”. This fulfils the criterion of “multiple attestation”. The parables were likely told by the historical Jesus and not compiled later, as these different streams all carry the doublet together. The earliest version, going back to Jesus is likely to have been the most absurd, carrying the element of “embarrassment”, which the two other tradition streams water down to be less absurd. Whether this was done by Mark and Thomas or whether this happened in oral tradition earlier cannot be clearly determined, but it is most plausible that the version now standing in Luke is the oldest. This early version might have not yet contained a sentence about the later practice of the wedding guests but probably contained a sentence about the good old wine.

The fact that this “Gender doublet” is so widely attested as a doublet is a strong argument against a theory of later compilation. Similarly, the fact that the most likely earliest version brings the female example first is an argument against deliberate construction. The parable doublet has “contextual plausibility” in the life and ministry of Jesus and the later effects are more easily explained as teaching flowing naturally from Jesus who was aware of having both men and women in his audience, than as a later construction by an early Christian. Jesus probably used examples appealing to different groups in his audience without making this an overt, conscious programme.

The absurdity of cutting up a new garment to fix an old one, or of wasting new wine by pouring it into brittle wineskins would not have been lost on a peasant audience of men and women. It would have been an amusing and memorable example, reinforcing the message that Jesus' message was new and different and could not simply be forced into old patterns of religious praxis. The examples were still retold even when the early church had settled back into a more conventional religious pattern. Celebratory meals with outcasts had given way to regular ritual meals mainly with the insiders. However the unconventional, more dangerous memory remained in the stories told, even though they were domesticated to show the superiority of Christianity over against the "old ways". Gender doublets remained in the tradition even while women were increasingly marginalized in the early church. The alternative tradition could not be completely silenced. This alternative tradition, more inclusive of women, may have been sidelined but can still be recovered in the texts.

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