

# The Hemorrhaging Woman and Jairus' Daughter as Representatives of Israel. An Attempt at the Symbolic Reading of Mark 5:21-43

ADAM KUBIŚ

Institute of Biblical Studies, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

e-mail: adam.kubis@kul.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-4961-2254

**Abstract:** The scope of the present study is the symbolic analysis of the two interwoven Markan narratives about the healing of the woman with the flow of blood (5:25-34) and the raising of Jairus' daughter (5:21-24.35-43). The principal thesis of this work consists in interpreting both women as symbols of Israel. The study begins with the presentation of the methodological premises of symbolic analysis. The main methodological premise of this work is the conviction that the literary sense of this pericope is in fact imbued with symbolism. Then there is a presentation of three criteria which help in detecting symbols in the biblical text: textual probability, conventions probability and contextual probability. Subsequently, in order to lend credence to the principal thesis of the article, seventeen literary elements found in Mark 5:21-43 are discussed; each of them meets the first two criteria and lends itself to symbolic interpretation of the two women as representations of Israel. The cumulative weight of these seventeen elements creates a rather strong cumulative argument in favor of the main thesis. Finally, the conformity between the symbolic interpretation of these women and both the immediate and global contexts of this pericope is discussed. The presence of this conformity meets the third criterion of contextual probability. The article thus offers a convincing case for the symbolic interpretation of the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus' daughter in Mark 5:21-43 as representations of Israel.

**Keywords:** Mark 5:21-43; symbol; symbolic exegesis; symbolism of the number twelve; Israel; Jairus; the hemorrhaging woman.

## 1. Introduction: Aim and Objectives

The present study aims at interpreting two Markan miracle stories, namely the healing of the woman with the issue of blood and the raising of Jairus' daughter, by means of an analysis sensitive to the presence of symbols.<sup>1</sup> The main thesis

<sup>1</sup> This article is a thoroughly revised, updated and expanded version, including completely new and original argumentation, of my study written in Polish and published as a chapter in an edited volume on the exegesis of the Gospel of Mark: A. Kubiś, "Kobieta cierpiąca na krwotok oraz córka Jaira jako symbol Izraela. Próba analizy symbolicznej Mk 5,21-43," *Studia nad Ewangelią według św. Marka*.

of this study consists in seeing both women as symbols standing for Israel. The narration itself invites a reader to treat these two figures together for at least two reasons: (1) a “sandwich” structure is employed<sup>2</sup> and (2) several verbal and thematic connections between the two episodes stand out.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout modern times exegetes have pointed out the symbolic nature of many Markan stories about healings, as each of them in a symbolic way reveals some truth about the coming of the Kingdom of God.<sup>4</sup> Thus a symbolic reading of the interwoven Markan accounts of the healing of the women suffering from an issue of blood and the raising of Jairus’ daughter is not a novelty in any respect. Rather, its symbolic, allegorical or typological dimension has been noted by several ancient, medieval and modern authors. Arie W. Zwiep made a succinct comment in this regard: “A widely attested line of interpretation beginning with Hilary, Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome likes to see Jairus as a type or allegory of the Jewish people (‘the Synagogue’) and, exploiting the contrast with Jairus and the fact that the woman’s national identity and her religious background are left unstated, understand the haemorrhaging woman as a type of the Gentiles (‘the Church’) having come to faith before Israel received salvation [Rom 11:25-26]”.<sup>5</sup> In these allegorical explanations, Jairus’ daughter was seen

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*Nowy Testament: geneza – interpretacja – aktualizacja* (ed. W. Linke – J. Kręciđło) (Warszawa – Ząbki: Bractwo Słowa Bożego – Apostolicum 2017) 66-111.

- 2 For a recent study on Markan intercalations see M. Moj, “Sandwich Technique in the Gospel of Mark”, *BibAn* 8 (2018) 363-377.
  - 3 For instance, fear, faith, daughter, prostration, a helpless situation, the number twelve, healing as salvation, touching bringing about healing, females as main characters, ritual impurity (in both cases this uncleanness is boldly ignored), Jesus’ power to give life, and a contrast between the public and private. Mary Ann Beavis (*Mark* [Paideia; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2011] 96) adds: “In both stories, Jesus displays prophetic powers (5:30, 36, 39) and is met with skepticism (vv. 31, 39-40). Both stories take place in an unnamed location on the Jewish side of the lake (v. 21).”
  - 4 Xavier Léon-Dufour (*Études d’Évangile* [Parole de Dieu 2; Paris: Seuil 1965] 129-130) observed: “Ces guérisons s’expriment par des actes et se racontent dans un langage qui ont souvent une portée symbolique: donner la vue, faire marcher, faire vivre. Ainsi le geste de “mettre debout” symbolize la resurrection [...]. Pour Marc les miracles de Jésus sont des réalités symboliques qui ont un sens, c’est-à-dire qui sont orientées vers une fin.” In the same vein, William R. Telford (*The Theology of the Gospel of Mark* [New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999] 100) argued: “Mark has used a number of the miracle stories for symbolic purposes. It is surely no accident that he has selected miracles which lend themselves easily to spiritual or theological interpretation (the cure of the blind, deaf or dumb or the raising of the dead).” See also X. Léon-Dufour, “Structure et fonction du récit de miracle,” *Les miracles de Jésus selon le Nouveau Testament* (ed. X. Léon-Dufour) (Parole de Dieu 16; Paris: Seuil 1977) 346; J.D.M. Derrett, “Why and How Jesus Walked on the Sea,” J.D.M. Derrett, *Studies in the New Testament. IV. Midrash, the Composition of Gospels, and Discipline* (Leiden: Brill 1986) 92.
  - 5 A.W. Zwiep, “Jairus, His Daughter and the Haemorrhaging Woman (Mk 5.21-43; Mt. 9.18-26; Lk. 8.40-56): Research Survey of a Gospel Story about People in Distress”, *CBR* 13/3 [2015] 355. A.W. Zwiep gives also a list of references to some of these commentators: Hilary of Poitiers, *Exp. Matt.* 9.6-7; Jerome, *Serm.* 77; Ambrose of Milan, *Exp. Luc.* 6.54-64; Petrus Chrysologus, *Coll. serm.* 33; 36.6; anonymous author (from *Scriptores Celtigenae*), *Exp. Marc.* 5; Christianus
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as a representation of the Synagogue *vel* Israel.<sup>6</sup> In modern symbolic exegesis of this Markan pericope, however, both women are seen as representations of Israel. Most often, modern commentators indicated the number twelve as the basis for this symbolic interpretation.<sup>7</sup> As a notable (and quite original) exception among modern symbolic readings of these two women, Roy D. Kotansky interpreted them as archetypal characters linked to heroes known from popular Greek, Roman and Near Eastern myths and cosmologies.<sup>8</sup>

The aim of the present study is two-fold, as reflected in the structure of the following presentation. First, some methodological premises of the technique of symbolic analysis will be established, including a presentation of specific criteria which will help in identifying symbols in a text. Second, we will discuss seventeen literary elements of Mark 5:21-43 which lend themselves to a symbolic reading of two main female figures as representatives of Israel. The established criteria will help in evaluating these chosen elements and their proposed interpretation. An overall objective is to, first, create a *résumé* of all the various intuitions advanced by a host of commentators over the years, secondly, to add some new

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Druthamri, *Exp. Matt.* 33; anonymous author (from *Scriptores Hiberniae minores*), *Comm. Luc.* 8; Thomas Aquinas, *Catena aurea in Marc.* 5.2.

- 6 E.g. Jerome, *Serm.* 77 ("The Church [=the hemorrhaging woman] has come to life, and the synagogue [=Jairus' daughter] is dead."); Bede the Venerable, *Exp. Marc.* 2.5.22 (*Filia ergo archisynagogi, ipsa est synagoga*). After J.A. Giles (ed.), *Complete Works of Venerable Bede in the Original Latin. X. Commentaries on the Scriptures* (London: Whittaker 1844) 76.
- 7 For instance, Juan Mateos and Fernando Camacho (*Il Vangelo di Marco. Analisi linguistica e commento esegetico* [Lettura del Nuovo Testamento 1; Assisi: Cittadella 1997] 461) argued: "L'infermità durava già da «dodici anni». Questa precisazione non necessaria crea una chiara allusione a Israele; lo stesso numero segnerà più avanti l'età della figlia di Giàiro (5,42). Viene confermato che entrambe le figure, anonime e senza tratti personali, indicano in qualche modo il popolo giudaico." Richard A. Horsley (*Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2001] 18-19) argued: "That the women healed in the "sandwiched" healing episodes are both characterized with the number *twelve*, which would evoke the thought of the twelve tribes of Israel, suggests that, besides being particular healed women, they are symbolic of the healing of the whole people of Israel." Horsley (*Hearing*, 206) added: "When the hemorrhaging woman is said to have been suffering 'for twelve years' and the synagogue leader's daughter is noted to be 'twelve years of age,' it could not be clearer that these women, while individual women, have greater significance in the story: they symbolize Israel itself, the people who are experiencing restoration and renewal in just such acts of healing by Jesus." Elsewhere, Horsley (*Hearing*, 226) also noted: "the woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years and the twelve-year-old woman who is almost dead appears as figures representative of Israel experiencing renewal in Jesus' exorcism and healings." Raquel S. Lettsome ("Mark," *Fortress Commentary on the Bible. The New Testament* [eds. M. Aymer – C.B. Kittredge – D.A. Sánchez] [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2014] 187) states: "Given that the number twelve, the number of Israel's tribes, is used with reference to both women, perhaps Mark intends these two females to symbolize Israel."
- 8 R.D. Kotansky, "Jesus and the Lady of the Abyss (Mark 5:25-34). *Hieros Gamos*, Cosmogony, and the Elixir of Life," *Antiquity and Humanity. Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy. Presented to Hans Dieter Betz on His 70th Birthday* (eds. A. Yarbro Collins – M.M. Mitchell) (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001) 77-120.

insights and arguments; and, third, to evaluate all of these in light of the established criteria.

## 2. Methodological Premises of Symbolic Analysis

Looking for a method helpful in exegetical analysis sensitive to the presence of a symbolic dimension, I refer to the findings of Lorenzo Gasparro, who presented in his published doctoral dissertation, in a synthetic and systematic way, the basic methodological assumptions of the symbolic analysis of the text of Mark's Gospel.<sup>9</sup> Undoubtedly, these assumptions can be applied in the analysis of every biblical text. Gasparro called his research procedure "exegetical-symbolic analysis" (*analisi esegetico-simbolica*). Here are the five basic assumptions of this analysis: (1) The pericope should be explained first and foremost based on the symbol present in the literal sense of the text. The literal sense, more importantly, is not omitted (as is the case with allegorical analysis), but is the basis of this analysis. (2) The realism or historicity of the described events are also not eliminated, but thanks to the presence of the symbol in the text, the narrative can be more fully and deeply interpreted. In this context, the suggestions of some exegetes are not acceptable, when they postulate that some of the events described in the pages of the Gospel are only symbolic, because, as they claim, the plot itself is a fiction not rooted in real history.<sup>10</sup> Symbolic, then, does not imply fictional. (3) Symbolic analysis does not exclude other methods in working on the biblical text, because it does not claim to be a completely self-sufficient method (*sui sufficiens*). Symbolic analysis, as rooted in the literal sense, is essentially interdisciplinary, because it assumes the use of various methods and approaches to the text in order to obtain the largest possible amount of data useful in explaining the examined pericope. (4) Symbolic analysis is conducted at both synchronic and diachronic levels, as some symbols have evolved over time. (5) Importantly, to extract all the richness of meaning of a given text, one cannot stop at a simple enumeration of symbols appearing in the pericope. What is crucial is to discover the development and specific contribution of these symbols to the biblical narrative. The symbol cannot be treated in isolation, as it often appears together with other symbols. The symbol also has the capacity to evoke realities, ideas or themes that are extremely capacious, as they are present in both the Old and New Testaments.

<sup>9</sup> L. Gasparro, *Simbolo e narrazione in Marco. La dimensione simbolica del secondo Vangelo alla luce della pericope del fico di Mc 11,12-25* (AnBib 198; Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press 2012) 50-58.

<sup>10</sup> J. Duncan M. Derrett ("Why and How," 92) states: "Jesus' miracles as narrated in Mark can be taken as symbolic statements without necessarily implying that any actual event served to inspire them."

As L. Gasparro notes, there is a risk of indicating the symbol where the text does not contain it. Hence, the Italian exegete distinguishes three criteria to help identify the presence of a symbol in a text, which he describes as (1) textual probability, (2) probability of convention and (3) contextual probability.<sup>11</sup> The basis for the first two criteria is the assumption that the symbolic element should have been easily identifiable in the biblical text studied (*ad* 1) and in the broad context of biblical tradition (*ad* 2).<sup>12</sup> Referring to the criterion of textual probability, the text itself can indicate its symbolic dimension through various signs (anomalies, linguistic ambiguities, grouping of metaphorical images, paradoxical and enigmatic elements). Not all cases of ambiguity need to be an example of symbolic reading, but their concentration and repeated occurrence may suggest symbolism.<sup>13</sup> Regarding the criterion of convention, certain realities (e.g. vine, shepherd, bread) already have symbolic value in the Old Testament and apocryphal tradition, hence their presence in the NT is by nature symbolic. As to the third criterion, the interpretative value of the symbol can only be read by taking into account the closest literary context of a given text as well as the global context of the entire book.

### 3. Symbolic Elements of Mark 5:21-43

In what follows, there will be a presentation of several elements of the narrative Mark 5:21-43 which lend themselves to the symbolic interpretation. In each case, the criteria of textual probability and conventional probability will be discussed. Each of these literary elements serves as an argument for interpreting two female figures of Mark 5:21-43 as representatives of Israel.

#### 3.1. The Number Twelve

For some commentators, the number twelve occurring twice in our pericope is merely another lexical linkage binding two (perhaps originally independent) miracle stories, and carries no theological or symbolic value at all.<sup>14</sup> Some authors

<sup>11</sup> Gasparro, *Simbolo*, 75-79.

<sup>12</sup> Lorenzo Gasparro (*Simbolo*, 55) argues: “Il criterio di base è che il valore simbolico di un elemento debba emergere dal testo stesso e dal contesto più ampio della tradizione biblica.”

<sup>13</sup> Gasparro, *Simbolo*, 76.

<sup>14</sup> For Marie-Joseph Lagrange (*Évangile selon Saint Marc* [ÉtB 10; Paris: Gabalda 1947] 140), the fact that it characterizes both women is “simple coincidence.” Robert A. Guelich (*Mark 1-8:26* [WBC 34A; Dallas, TX: Word Books 1989] 296) judged it, “another perhaps less than coincidental

interpret twelve as a round number indicating an affliction of very long standing.<sup>15</sup> However, in order to show the gravity of this long-standing illness, there is no real need to state such a precise number of years. Charles Cranfield sees twelve as a detail recalled by an eyewitness.<sup>16</sup> With reference to the age of Jairus' daughter, Vincent Taylor sees the number as added to explain to readers that a girl was old enough to get up and walk by herself.<sup>17</sup> Not surprisingly, then, Robert Stein ignores the obvious symbolic purport of the number, arguing: "Although the number possesses great symbolism in the Bible, there is no reason not to interpret the number literally."<sup>18</sup> In what follows, we would like to counter this skeptical attitude toward the symbolic meaning of this numeral. In any event, embracing its literal meaning and narrative function does not preclude its further symbolical meaning.

As noted above, a basic criterion for identifying a symbol is textual probability, i.e. facility, easiness, lack of difficulty in identification of a symbol in a text. Undoubtedly, the number twelve in our pericope meets this criterion, because Mark mentions it explicitly twice. It characterizes both the hemorrhaging woman (5:25) and Jairus' daughter (5:42).

Referring to the convention criterion, it goes without saying that the number twelve is a well known biblical symbol standing for Israel. However, a symbolical meaning for the number twelve in biblical traditions is not limited to sym-

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point of contact." In the same vein, Joel Marcus (*Mark 1–8. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AncB 27; New York: Doubleday 2000] 363) noted: "The two stories may originally have been brought together partly because they both mentioned twelve years."

15 See V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan 1966) 290; B. Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2001) 186.

16 C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark. An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, U.K. – New York: Cambridge University Press 1963) 191.

17 Taylor, *Mark*, 294.

18 R.H. Stein, *Mark* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2008) 267. Adela Yarbro Collins (*Mark. A Commentary* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2007] 280), commenting on the twelve-year-long oozing of blood, states: "It is unlikely that this number is symbolic." Referring to the whole pericope and the double occurrence of the number twelve, she (p. 286) noted: "The two narratives should indeed be interpreted in light of each other, but there is no indication that either number is symbolic." Robert H. Gundry (*Mark. A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1993] 284) argued that the number twelve "probably carries no theological meaning. We should not see in the correlation an allusion to the choice of the twelve apostles. Mark leaves such an allusion unclear. Two periods of time so disparate in kind hardly relate to each other, much less to Jesus' making a selection from among his followers. We are justified only in seeing an interesting coincidence in historical data." There is some incongruity in Susan Haber's proposal ("A Woman's Touch: Feminist Encounters with the Hemorrhaging Woman in Mark 5.24-34," *JSNT* 26 [2003] 189), who speaks of a symbolic value to this number (alas, it is not clear what this number symbolizes) but, at the same time, limits its meaning to a simple narrative link: "the repetition of this symbolic number solidifies the connection between the girl and the hemorrhaging woman."

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bolizing Israel. Marc Girard enumerated five categories in which the number twelve functions in the Bible: (1) sociological: election; (2) biological: maturity; (3) anthropological: light of the day (see John 11:9-10); (4) cultic: sacrifice (see Num 7:3.84-86.87-88; Ezra 6:17); and (5) cosmic: measure of time and space (see 1 Kgs 7:23-25; 2 Chr 4:2-4.15; Rev 21:16-17).<sup>19</sup> According to Girard, who acknowledged the symbolic sense of the number twelve in our pericope, its meaning is connected with the biological category and refers to sexual maturity. An example of such a meaning for this number is the account about twelve-years-old Jesus in the temple, where he manifests his autonomy and maturity (Luke 2:42). Twelve-year-old Jairus' daughter, brought back to life, is now again fertile, ready to give life. In this way, she reaches her maturity. In the case of the hemorrhaging woman, the number twelve refers to her restored fecundity, thus her biological capacity of giving life.<sup>20</sup> Benoît Standaert interprets the number twelve in our pericope according to the cosmic category. In his opinion, it refers to the number of daily and nightly hours as well as to the number of months in a year. He argues that the double occurrence of this number in our pericope underlines the meaning of Jesus' intervention, which unblocks unchangeable and permanent situations, renewing them by means of the gift of life and fertility.<sup>21</sup>

In our reading of Mark 5:21-43, the number twelve ought to be interpreted within the first category proposed by Marc Girard, namely the theme of election, being chosen. According to Girard the number twelve, viewed via this category, refers in the Bible to (1) Israel, as the nation chosen by God (see Exod 24:4; 28:17-21; 1 Kgs 11:30-31); (2) priests and Levites, as chosen by God (see Num 17:16-26); (3) King David, chosen by God (see 1 Kgs 10:16.20; 2 Chr 9:15.19); (4) prophets, chosen by God (1 Kgs 19:19-20; Sir 40:10); (5) the pagan world, chosen by God (the number of Gentiles, 12x10,000, in Jonah 4:11); (6) Twelve Apostles and 72 sent disciples (12x6; Luke 10:1.17), as chosen by God; (7) Church, chosen by God from its inception: 120 persons, 12x10, gathered in the Upper Room (Acts 1:13-16); (8) Church, chosen by God, during its history (Acts 19:7; James 1:1; Rev 12:1); (9) the glorified Church, chosen by God, existing in heaven (Rev 4:4; 7:4-9; 21:12-14.19-21; 22:2); (10) chosen leaders and officials (Num 1:44; 1 Kgs 4:7; 1 Chr 27:1-15; Ezra 2:2; Neh 7:7; Dan 6:2); (11) Choosing people for special mission (Num 13:1-16; Deut 1:23; Josh 3:12; 4:2-9.20; Ezra 8:24); (12) Chosen number of men for combat (Num 31:4-6; 2 Sam 2:14-16; 17:1; Jdt 2:5.15; 7:2; 1 Macc 15:13; 2 Macc 12:20; por. 1 Macc 8:6; Matt 16:53).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> M. Girard, *Symboles bibliques, langage universel: pour une théologie des deux Testaments ancrée dans les sciences humaines* (Montréal: Médiaspaul 2016) 1071-1085.

<sup>20</sup> Girard, *Symboles bibliques*, 1082.

<sup>21</sup> B. Standaert, *Évangile selon Marc. Commentaire. Première partie. Marc 1, 1 à 6, 13* (ÉtB 61; Pendé: Gabalda 2010) 401, note 1.

<sup>22</sup> Girard, *Symboles bibliques*, 1071-1081.

The criterion of convention probability is met because the symbolical purport of the number twelve with reference to Israel was acknowledged by both OT and NT authors. In fact, in the majority of biblical occurrences in the OT and the NT this numeral refers to the theme of election.<sup>23</sup> Symbolic use of the numeral in one NT writing (see Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30; Rev 7:5-8; 21:12) should at least suggest the possibility of its symbolic use elsewhere in the NT. Moreover, Mark himself uses this numeral in a symbolic way on two other occasions: describing the number of the apostles (3,14.16; 4,10; 6,7; 9,35; 10,32; 11,11; 14,10.17.20.43) as well as the number of baskets full of broken pieces left over during the first multiplication of bread and fish (6:43; 8:19). In these two cases, Mark uses this numeral within the compass of Girard's first category, namely the theme of election, and specifically of Israel, as the chosen nation. The statistics might also help to specify the meaning of this numeral in Mark. The number twelve occurs in Mark only as a designation of the apostles, the baskets of the first multiplication, and in relation to each of the two women in our pericope. If in the first two cases it undoubtedly refers to Israel, then it seems reasonable to assume that also in our pericope (the third and the last case) the meaning of this numeral might conform to the meaning of its other occurrences in Mark, namely to Israel.

## 1.2. Feminine Sex

Richard A. Horsley stated: "It almost goes without saying that these two women can be representative and symbolic of Israel only *as women*."<sup>24</sup> Referring to the criterion of convention, it must be said that a woman in the OT functions as a personification of a group of people, including the people of Israel (see Amos 5:2; Jer 14:17; 18:13; 31:4.21). The noun γυνή, which describes the hemorrhaging woman (5:25.33), designates in ancient Greek, including the NT Greek, an adult female person, *woman*, but also a married woman, *wife*, and a newly married woman, *bride*.<sup>25</sup> If Jesus is a messianic groom, his bride is by definition Israel.<sup>26</sup> Each single Israelite, both man and woman, is a member of the collectively defined bride of God (see Hos 1-3; Jer 2:2; 31:3; Isa 54:5-8; 61:10; 62:4-5). In the

23 Marc Girard (*Symboles bibliques*, 1071) notes: "Dans l'immense majorité des cas, douze et ses multiples évoquent l'idée de choix, d'élection."

24 Horsley, *Hearing*, 212.

25 F. Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2015) 447; cf. BDAG 208-209.

26 In Mark 2:18-22, Jesus refers to himself as the bridegroom and his own ministry as a wedding banquet. See M. Tait, *Jesus, the Divine Bridegroom, in Mark 2:18-22. Mark's Christology Upgraded* (AnBib 185; Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press 2010); P.J. Long, *Jesus the Bridegroom. The Origin of the Eschatological Feast as a Wedding Banquet in the Synoptic Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications 2013) 193-197.



messianic perspective, the Messiah's bride consists of all members of the Kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus, the Bridegroom Messiah. Among those members, there are those who experience healings (here the hemorrhaging woman) and raising from the dead (here Jairus's daughter). The nuptial metaphor, found both in the OT and the NT, makes obvious the choice of women as symbols of renewed Israel, messianic community of the Kingdom of God.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly enough, with the exception of our pericope and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (1:32), there are only males who are experiencing healings in the Gospel of Mark. The healing of Peter's mother-in-law is somehow overshadowed by the information found in the immediate literary context about the healing of the whole crowd of people (1:33). This singularity and uniqueness of healings experienced by women in Mark might also suggest their symbolic purport.<sup>28</sup>

J. Duncan M. Derrett interprets the whole pericope through the lenses of nuptial metaphor: Jesus is the groom, the girl – the spouse, the three disciples – the best men (the friends of the groom, or groomsmen; see Mark 2:19), and the father and mother are there 'to give the girl'.<sup>29</sup> J. Mateos and F. Camacho see the same symbolism of a wedding feast here, arguing also that in Mark's mention of the "house" and "mother" there is an allusion to Song of Songs 3:4 ("my mother's house"). In their opinion, the girl and Jesus, entering symbolically into marriage, establish in fact a new covenant (Jer 31:31), Jesus' covenant (see Mark 14:24), which is created no longer between God and Israel, but between the Son of God and renewed Israel.<sup>30</sup> The Spanish commentators notice also a progressive shift in the way this female is described: from (1) θυγάτριον ("little daughter") in 5:23, to (2) θυγάτηρ ("daughter") in 5:35, (3) παιδίον ("child") in 5:39.40bis.41, and finally (4) κοράσιον ("girl", "young woman") in 5:41. These descriptions reflect a shift in the relationship of this female with regard to her

<sup>27</sup> Eugene LaVerdiere (*The Beginning of the Gospel. Introducing the Gospel according to Mark. I. Mark 1–8:21* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 1999] 133) stresses the literal understanding of the female sex of the two heroines of our pericope: "The healing of the woman and the raising of the young girl introduced them into the community of faith and salvation. Giving them life, Jesus abolished the distinction between men and women regarding membership in the new Israel. As the community of the Twelve, the Church would reach out to women and welcome them in the community." This reasoning is not convincing as Israel in the OT is made of both men and women. There is no radical novelty between the economy of the OT and the one in the NT with regard to sexes. The Kingdom of God is welcoming both men and women, making no distinction between them (see Gal 3:28). The lack of the term γυνή in the description of Jairus' daughter is not crucial. What matters is her sex and age, which makes her marriageable according to Jewish law.

<sup>28</sup> The same can be said about exorcisms. The only female experiencing exorcism is the Syrophenician's daughter (7:24–30). These two women (mother and daughter) might function as symbolic representations of Gentiles, Israel's enemies.

<sup>29</sup> J.D.M. Derrett, "Mark's Technique: The Haemorrhaging Woman and Jairus' Daughter," *Bib* 63/4 (1982) 485–486.

<sup>30</sup> Mateos – Camacho, *Marco*, 481.

father, mother and Jesus: from (1) possession, dependence and tenderness, to (2) possession and dependence, (3) minority (but bereft of the idea of possession and dependence), and ultimately (4) a young woman ready for marriage and independent from her parents. In light of the nuptial metaphor and the symbolic identity of this female as the representative of Israel, this progression could be interpreted as follows: (1 & 2) *past*: dependence on the institution; (3) *present*: simple independence, without any enslavement, but with an uncertain future; and (4) *future*: complete independence and new relationship, a hope for life and fecundity because of the presence of the groom, and a new society of equal and free people.<sup>31</sup>

### 1.3. Anonymity

A significant detail of the Markan narration, one which confirms the symbolical identification of women as the representatives of Israel, is the anonymity of these two main female figures.<sup>32</sup> Their namelessness is even more striking because Mark gives the name of Jairus and at the same time omits the names both of Jairus' daughter and of the healed woman. Their anonymity forces the reader to concentrate on the characteristics of both women.<sup>33</sup> Their namelessness might underscore the helplessness of their situations, but it can also help us to see them as symbolic figures. Along with the many nameless female figures of Israel in the OT, their anonymity makes them perfect candidates for representing of Israel in the Markan account.

This argument is less than conclusive, however, since, apart from the Twelve, many of the males in Mark's stories about healings and exorcisms likewise have no names. There are two exceptions, Jairus and Bartimaeus, but their names can also have symbolical meaning. In the case of women, almost all the female figures are anonymous in Mark. On the one hand, the identification of Markan women by their relationship to males (e.g. Peter's mother-in-law, Jairus' daughter, poor widow, Jesus' mother) reflects the context of patriarchal culture. Yet there are also certain women described by their relationship to other women (e.g. Herodias's daughter, the Syrophenician's daughter), as well as women who do not belong to any of the aforementioned groups (e.g. the Syrophenician, the woman who anointed Jesus, the hemorrhaging woman). At the same time, however, some

<sup>31</sup> Mateos – Camacho, *Marco*, 482–483.

<sup>32</sup> Mateos – Camacho, *Marco*, 461.

<sup>33</sup> Adele Reinhartz ("Why ask my name?" *Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative* [Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998] 188) noted that "principle effect of the absence of a proper name is to focus the reader's attention on the role designations that flood into the gap that anonymity denotes."

women are known by their names (Herodias – 6:22; Mary Magdalene – 16:1.9; Mary and Salome – 16:1).<sup>34</sup>

#### 1.4. Barrenness

In line with the first criterion, that of textual probability, the Markan text suggests that the ailment of the woman with a flow of blood was gynecological in nature and made her incapable of child bearing. This assumption is corroborated by the vocabulary employed to describe her condition, since it is used by ancient Greek writers to define the discharge from the womb.<sup>35</sup> This type of bleeding would probably have resulted in quarantine,<sup>36</sup> and consequently a divorce. In the case of the Markan woman, the attempted medical treatment of her vaginal bleeding led to her complete financial deprivation as she depleted all her resources (5:26). The fact that she herself is spending her own money suggests that she is alone, unmarried. The healing she experienced from Jesus seems to be the only case in the entire NT of a cure referring to reproductive organs. Mary R. D'Angelo even argued that the ailments of both the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus's daughter can be interpreted as referring to their sexual organs: "the affliction of two women in Mark 5:21-43 is identified as disease, not impurity, and their diseases can be diagnosed in terms of ancient medicine (and its more popular cousins): the woman with the flow of blood suffers from a too-open womb, while that of the young girl was too closed."<sup>37</sup> The twelve-year-old girl was just on the

<sup>34</sup> Some authors, e.g. Gerd Theissen (*The Gospel in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1991] 186-189) and Richard Bauckham (*Jesus and the Eyewitnesses. The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2017] 184-201) argue that Mark consciously concealed the names of heroes in his gospel in order to protect them from hostility and persecution (so-called protective anonymity).

<sup>35</sup> Aristotle, *Historia Animalium* 3.19 (521a.25-27). See L. Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Oxford: Clarendon 1994) 129-130; R. Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women: Gender, Nature, and Authority from Celsus to Galen* (New York: Oxford University Press 2000) 211-212; C.R. Moss – J.S. Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness* (Princeton, NJ – Oxford, U.K.: Princeton University Press 2015) 201. A lexical parallel between Mark and Leviticus 15 (LXX) suggests that the woman was suffering from chronic menstrual bleeding. For this reason one ought to dismiss interpretations pointing toward bleeding from a wound in her leg, breast, nose or the like. Cf. A.-J. Levine, "Discharging Responsibility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law, and Hemorrhaging Woman," *Treasures Old and New: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies* (ed. D.R. Bauer – M.A. Powell) (SBLSS 1; Atlanta, GA: Scholars 1996) 384.

<sup>36</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 357.

<sup>37</sup> M.R. D'Angelo, "Power, Knowledge and the Bodies of Women in Mark 5:21-43," *The Woman with the Blood Flow* (Mark 5,24-34). *Narrative, Iconic, and Anthropological Spaces* (ed. B. Baert) (Art & Religion 2; Leuven & Walpole, MA: Peeters 2014) 105. The same conclusions are present in M.R. D'Angelo, "Gender and Power in the Gospel of Mark: The Daughter of Jairus and the Woman with the Flow of Blood," *Miracles in Jewish and Christian Antiquity: Imagining Truth* (ed. J.C. Cavadini) (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press 1999) 83-109.

threshold of womanhood, reaching an age seen by the later rabbis as an appropriate moment to marry and give birth to progeny (see *b. Yebamot* 75a).<sup>38</sup> Another argument for seeing a theme of fecundity and barrenness in the episode of raising Jairus's daughter might be a parallel to this narrative found in a work by Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii Tyanensis* (4.45), where he described the miraculous resuscitation of a young Roman woman, which was performed by Neophythagorean philosopher Apollonius from Tyana. Interestingly enough, the resuscitated woman from Philostratus's account had died at the very hour of her marriage, as the groom, proceeding after her corpse, complains about an interrupted wedding ceremony.<sup>39</sup> The message of the Markan narration consists in restoring to the women their ability to become mothers, to give birth.<sup>40</sup> In the symbolic analysis of this narrative, Israel, a barren unmarried woman, becomes a fertile bride in contact with Jesus, her groom.

Referring to our second methodological criterion, the metaphor of barrenness with reference to Israel is found in the OT (see Isa 54:1) and elsewhere in the NT (see Gal 4:27).<sup>41</sup> The childlessness of Israel is a sign of a curse, transgressing God's law, the breaking of the covenant with God, Israel's groom (Hos 9:10-17, see Deut 7:14).

Recently Candida R. Moss and Joel S. Baden advanced an interpretation which would undermine the one presented above.<sup>42</sup> Both authors argue that the healing of the woman did not consist in restoring her fertility, but – using not entirely adequate medical terminology – in cauterizing her sick body. The Greek term ξηραίνω, used in Mark 5:29, means literally “dried up,” “scorched,” or “hardened.” In other places Mark uses this verb to describe the withering of a fig tree (11:20.21). The state of withering was related in the OT (Isa 56:3; Hos 9:26), and in Greek literature, to barrenness. According to Moss and Baden, the Markan

<sup>38</sup> According to the Jewish custom, as reflected in *b. Yebamot* 80a, a girl became a woman at twelve years and one day. Eckhard J. Schnabel (*Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* [Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 2; London: Inter-Varsity Press 2017] 124) also observes: “in Rome, at the time of Augustus, the legal minimum age for girls to be married was twelve.”

<sup>39</sup> In John P. Meier's opinion, Philostratus “possibly borrowed” this story from the Gospel, conflating the episode of the raising of the daughter of Jarus (Mark 5:21-43) and the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17). The theme of marriage, present in Philostratus's account, might reflect an early Christian nuptial interpretation of the episode about raising Jairus's daughter. See J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. II. Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (AncBL; New York: Doubleday 1994) 580.

<sup>40</sup> With reference to the hemorrhaging woman, Sabine Haber (“A Woman's Touch,” 191) states: “In my view, the poignancy of the entire pericope is predicated on her being a woman and on her having an illness that affects her feminine role in bearing children.”

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Rees (“Barren, Barrenness,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Fully Revised [ed. G.W. Bromiley] [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1979] I, 433) comments: “Metaphorically, Israel, in her days of adversity, when her children were exiled, was barren, but in her restoration she shall rejoice in many children.”

<sup>42</sup> Moss – Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 202-228.

hemorrhaging woman was infertile because of her vaginal bleeding, but after her healing, i.e. her 'drying up,' she still remain barren.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, in her healing one might see a prefiguration of the resurrection of the body. This woman, by not becoming fertile, became a model of the eschatological body. According early Christian beliefs, the ideal body could be barren, because fertility was not seen as a constitutive element of a glorified body. Indeed, Moss' and Baden's very original interpretation might be corroborated by the presence of the allusion to resurrection in the account of the raising of Jairus' daughter. Nevertheless, this interpretation is not convincing. It is simply not clear how or why the Markan audience would have identified the healed body of the woman with the state of the eschatological, glorified body.

### 1.5. Bleeding

As noted above, the Markan vocabulary describing the blood issuing from of the woman suggests that this bleeding is uterine, vaginal. This type of blood issue is discussed in the legislative texts of the Book of Leviticus along with menstrual bleeding (15:19-33). The lexeme used there to describe the menstrual bleeding, דָּגַג, became in the Hebrew Bible a synonym for sin (see Zech 13:1) and anything abhorrent (Lev 20:21; Ezra 9:11; Ezek 7:19). This word refers to incest (Lev 20:21), pagan cult (Ezra 9:11; Ezek 7:20) or generally to Israel's sins and unholy conduct (Ezek 36:17). Most importantly, however, in Lamentations, Jerusalem, abandoned and unfaithful to God, described as a widow (1:1), daughter Zion (1:6) and daughter Judah (1:15), is also referred to by means of this term (1:17). Very similar negative connotations accompany דָּגַג, another biblical lexeme referring to menstrual bleeding (Lev 12:2; 15:33; 20:18; Isa 30:22; Lam 1:13; 5:17). In Isa 30:22, it refers to cultic pagan statues. In Lam 1:13, the tragic fate of Jerusalem is compared by means of this term to menstrual bleeding lasting all day long.<sup>44</sup> Mark, then, mentioning explicitly (twice – 5:25.29) the bleeding of a woman (first criterion), could be referring to a very powerful element of OT

<sup>43</sup> Candida Moss and Joel Baden (*Reconceiving Infertility*, 203) argue: "The language of drying and hardening in Mark 5 could imply not merely a return to "natural" fertility, but in fact a transition to a permanent state of hardening. Dried female bodies carried with them overtones of barrenness. [...] The aggressiveness of the scorching language used in Mark might similarly denote a more permanent transformation. She is, in effect, cauterized."

<sup>44</sup> Aquila, Symmachus and Syriac translation render Lam 1:8 as "Because Jerusalem sinned, she became impure." The noun דָּגַג found here can originate from דָּגַג ("to be unclean"). The next verse (1:9) also refers to the ritual impurity of Jerusalem, personified as a woman: "her uncleanness is in her skirts." The noun דָּגַג occurring here can designate menstrual uncleanness (Lev 15:25.26.30; 18:19; Ezek 36:17).

symbolism (second criterion), namely the people of Israel, God's bride, depicted as widowed, unclean, and suffering menstrual pains and bleeding.<sup>45</sup>

### 1.6. Loneliness

Another symbolic element of our pericope is the potential loneliness of the woman suffering from a vaginal hemorrhage.<sup>46</sup> Referring to first our first criterion, as already noted, this woman could receive a letter of divorce based on her ailment, which impeded any sexual relations and/or child bearing. That there is no mention of her husband might suggest her virginity or widowhood. Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh noted that "the fact that the woman herself spends the money would mean she is a widow."<sup>47</sup> They also suggested she could be originally a member of the elite, since professional physicians were used primarily by economically privileged social groups. The long period of twelve years of medical treatment additionally corroborate her once-significant financial status,<sup>48</sup> which again might point toward her state of widowhood.

Referring to the second criterion (probability of convention), in the OT there occurs the image of the widow as a symbol of Israel (see Isa 54:4-6; Jer 51:5) and of Jerusalem (see Lam 1:1). God is named the 'judge of widows' in Israel (Ps 68:6). Jeremiah's prophecy (49:11) repeats the words of God: "Leave your orphans behind and I will keep them alive. Your widows too can depend on me" (net). Taking into account this OT imagery, the widowed and barren woman might perfectly function as a sad image of Israel deprived of life and the Bridegroom. Mark 5:21-43 would then argue that only by faith in Jesus, Israel regains its Bridegroom and returns to life and starts to give life.

<sup>45</sup> Discussing Mark 5:25-34, Marie N. Sabin ("The Gospel according to Mark," *The New Collegeville Bible Commentary: New Testament* [ed. D. Durken] [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 2009] 128) noted: "In biblical writings, a menstruating woman is used as a symbol of idolatry," but she draws from this observation no interpretive insight for either the pericope as a whole nor its female character.

<sup>46</sup> Monika Fander ("Das Evangelium nach Markus. Frauen als wahre Nachfolgerinnen Jesu," *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung* [ed. L. Schottroff – M.-T. Wacker] [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn 1999] 502) states: "Die Blutflüssige ist allein, ohne Familie, körperlich und finanziell ausgeblutet."

<sup>47</sup> B.J. Malina – R.L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2003) 167.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. M.A. Tolbert, "Mark," *Women's Bible Commentary*, Expanded Edition (ed. C.A. Newsom – S.H. Ringe) (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 1998) 355.



## 1.7. Virginity

As to the first criterion of textual probability, the virginity of the twelve-year-old girl is strongly implied by the text which mentions her young age and her parents as the closest persons to her, with no reference to her husband. Her virginity is also suggested by the diminutive θυγάτριον (“little daughter”, “girl”) used to describe her person. As to the second criterion, in many places in the OT the word “virgin” is understood in collective sense referring to Israel: “virgin – daughter Zion” (2 Kgs 19:21; Isa 37:22; Lam 2:13), “virgin – daughter Judah” (Lam 1:15), “virgin – daughter of my people” (Jer 14:17), “virgin – Israel” (Amos 5:2; Jer 18:13; 31:4.21). A virgin woman can then easily and naturally symbolize Israel.

## 1.8. Daughter

Another premise suggesting the symbolic reading of the two female figures in our pericope is the use of the term θυγάτηρ (“daughter”). Both women are referred to in this way (see 5:34 for the hemorrhaging woman<sup>49</sup> and 5:35 for Jairus' daughter, including the diminutive θυγάτριον in 5:23). When Jesus calls the hemorrhaging woman “daughter”, it does not necessarily imply any biological bond between her and him, a father-daughter relationship, although in the remaining occurrences of θυγάτηρ in Mark, the noun does refer to familial bonds of mother-daughter (6:22; 7:26.29) and father-daughter (5:34). One can speculate whether Jesus' way of addressing this woman was a culturally accepted way of expressing sympathy or if it had a more symbolic sense. Both options might reasonably be embraced. J. Marcus noted that “in the OT and later Jewish traditions ‘my daughter’ is a typical respectful and affectionate mode of address to females regardless of age or family relationship (see e.g. Ruth 2:8; 3:10).”<sup>50</sup> In fact, this woman could be even older than Jesus. J. Marcus also noted that “Jesus' address may also involve the concept of the Christian community as a new family.”<sup>51</sup> Yet, to my mind, it could have also a symbolic purport. The reason for it is OT imagery of Zion, Jerusalem, and Judah, all depicted as God's daughter (see our second criterion).<sup>52</sup> More importantly, in many places in the OT the phrase “Daughter – My People” describes

<sup>49</sup> In Mark 5:34, Jesus describes this woman in four different ways that define her new status. She is (1) sent (Jesus' command “Go!” – ὑπάγε), (2) saved (σώζω), (3) she is daughter (she belongs again to her biological family and she enters a larger social group, namely to the family of God, *familia Dei*) and (4) she departs “in peace” (εἰς εἰρήνην), which is the synonym of blessing.

<sup>50</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 360.

<sup>51</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 360. See Mark 10:29–30.

<sup>52</sup> “Daughter Zion” (e.g. Ps 9:15; Isa 1:8; Zeph 3:14; Zech 2:14; 9:9), “daughter Jerusalem” (2 Kgs 19:21; Isa 37:22; Lam 2:15; Zeph 3:14; Zech 9:9) and “daughter Judah” (Lam 1:15; 2:2.5).

Israel.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, in the OT the term “daughter” alone designates Israel in Jer 31:32 and Zeph 3:10. This OT background suggests then the possibility of Mark intentionally referring the word “daughter” to Israel, with the same connection made in the minds of his audience. In fact, Juan Mateos and Fernando Camacho see here an indisputable (“senza dubbio”) allusion to Jer 8:22 (LXX) which speaks of the inadequacy of physicians, and the healing of Israel, God’s daughter, only by means of God’s intervention.<sup>54</sup>

## 1.9. Death

In the case of Jairus’s daughter, her death is explicitly stated by people who came from the synagogue ruler’s house (5:35). Jesus’ assertion about her being asleep (5:39) “makes use of the common OT, Jewish, and NT metaphor of death as a form of sleep.”<sup>55</sup> In the case of the hemorrhaging woman, however, this theme is present in an implicit way. For instance, James A. Brooks argued: “The woman probably could not have lived much longer. Therefore Jesus rescued her from approaching death. Mark likely saw in her healing an anticipation of the resurrection of Jairus’s daughter.”<sup>56</sup> In the view of ancient people, the vaginal, menstrual issue of blood was connected with death. Pliny the Elder (*Historia naturalis* 7.64-65) states:

But nothing could easily be found that is more remarkable than the monthly flux of women. Contact with it turns new wine sour, crops touched by it become barren, grafts die, seeds in gardens are dried up, the fruit of trees falls off, the bright surface of mirrors in which it is merely reflected is dimmed, the edge of steel and the gleam of ivory are dulled, hives of bees die, even bronze and iron are at once seized by rust, and a horrible smell fills the air; [65] to taste it drives dogs mad and infects their bites with an incurable poison.<sup>57</sup>

As for the Jewish world, things did not look much different. Joel Marcus noted that “in *b. Pesah.* the opinion is even expressed that proximity to a menstruating woman can cause death.”<sup>58</sup> J. Marcus also refers to a story in *Hekhalot Rabbati* 18 according to which a piece of wool that had been touched by a men-

<sup>53</sup> Isa 22:4; Jer 4:11; 6:26; 8:11.19.21.22.23; 9:6; 14:17; Lam 2:11; 3:48; 4:3.6.10.

<sup>54</sup> Mateos – Camacho, *Marco*, 468.

<sup>55</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 371.

<sup>56</sup> J.A. Brooks, *Mark* (NAC 23; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman 1991) 96.

<sup>57</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*. II. *Books 3–7* (trans. H. Rackham) (LCL 352; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1961) 549.

<sup>58</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 357.

struating woman canceled a miraculous or magic power of a certain rabbi. The above-mentioned convictions of the ancient societies stemmed from the belief that blood contains life (see Lev 17:11.14).<sup>59</sup> In light of these data, the twelve-year-long bleeding of the Markan woman was in essence a slow, twelve-year-long process of dying.<sup>60</sup> Thus, both women in Mark 5:21-43 experience death, and for both of them their encounter with Jesus meant the restoration of their lives and of the ability to give life by child-bearing. In contact with Jesus, there is no room for death. In terms of a symbolic reading of the whole pericope, dead Israel, in contact with Jesus, became alive and able to give life.<sup>61</sup>

Looking for our second criterion, one might refer to any OT image of dying or dead Jerusalem (e.g. Isa 14:19) or Israel (e.g. Jer 7:33; 16:4; Ezek 6:5-7; 29:5), not least the very suggestive vision of the valley of dry bones in Ezek 37, where dead Israel comes to life. Merging the OT imagery of woman, barrenness, bleeding, virgin and daughter, combined with the nuptial metaphor of God, the Bridegroom of Israel, brings almost spontaneously to mind an image from Ezek 16:6 where God, who is passing by (as Jesus in our pericope), said “Live!” (חַיֵּה), giving new life to his bride, Israel, a newborn infant girl, wallowing in her blood and abandoned to die.<sup>62</sup>

### 1.10. The Verb σώζω

In our pericope the verb σώζω occurs three times. Both Jairus (5:23) and the woman with the issue of blood (5:28) connect σώζω with Jesus' healing power. Then Jesus himself (5:34) connects it with the woman's faith. The word σώζω is semantically ambivalent, as it can mean “to heal” as well as “to save”. In Mark

<sup>59</sup> The biblical link between blood and life on the one hand, and the issue of blood and death on the other, is elaborated, among others, by Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AncB 3; New York: Doubleday 1991) 766-768. He states (p. 766-767): “The loss of vaginal blood and semen, both containing seed, meant the diminution of life and, if unchecked, destruction and death. And it was a process unalterably opposed by Israel's God, the source of life [...]. Moreover, in the Israelite mind, blood was the archsymbol of life [...]. Its oozing from the body was no longer the work of demons, but it was certainly the sign of death. In particular, the loss of seed in vaginal blood [...] was associated with the loss of life.”

<sup>60</sup> LaVerdiere (*The Beginning*, 136) argued: “Saying that the woman was suffering from a twelve-year flow of blood was saying that life itself had been draining from her for twelve years.” See also G.R. Osborne, *Mark* (Teach the Text Commentary Series; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 2014) 87.

<sup>61</sup> Horsley (*Hearing*, 212) comments: “We might even hear connotations of the twelve-year-old woman near death just as she was coming through puberty into childbearing age as representative of the people Israel near death. In being restored to life by Jesus she was representative of a dying Israel being restored to life and ready to bear the fruit of new life of, and in, Israel.”

<sup>62</sup> In fact, Mateos and Camacho (*Marco*, 475) see here a nuptial metaphor and interpret “[girl] is sleeping” (Mark 5:39) and “[Jesus] said” (5:41) as allusions to Song of Songs 5:2 LXX (“I am sleeping, but my heart is awake. My brotherkin's voice” – nets).

this verb denotes saving life (3:4; 13:20; 15:30.31), physical healing (5:23.28.34; 6:56; 10:52), as well as receiving eternal life (8:35; 10:26; 13:13). The combination of two semantic fields, the physical “healing” and spiritual reality of “salvation,” almost spontaneously invites a play on symbolic meaning. The physical healing is a visible sign and also a symbolic prefiguration of the spiritual and invisible reality of salvation. The “healing” (or resuscitation) of both women is a symbol of “salvation.” Both in the OT and the NT, in many places, physical healings and resuscitations were manifestations of God’s saving act performed in favor of his people of Israel. In Mark, then, Jesus is presented as an embodiment of God of Israel, the only Savior of his people.

### 1.11. Resurrection

Describing the resuscitation of Jairus’ daughter, Mark employed the verbs ἐγείρω (5:41) and ἀνίστημι (5:42). The same terms are used by Mark to define Jesus’ resurrection (ἐγείρω – 14:28; 16:6.14; ἀνίστημι – 8:31; 9:9.10.31; 10:34; 16:9) and the resurrection of believers in Jesus (ἐγείρω – 6:14.16; 12:26; ἀνίστημι – 12:23.25). In the same vein, pointing out other lexical echoes, Morna D. Hooker argued:

Another very interesting feature of this story is the vocabulary, much of which would be appropriate to the resurrection hope of the Christian community: the verbs ‘save’ and ‘live’ in v. 23, the contrast between death and sleep in v. 39, the command to get up in v. 41 (once again we have ἔγειρε – see 2:9 and 3:3), the mockery of the bystanders in v. 42, all suggest that those who heard the story would see another significance in it: the child’s restoration would be understood as a symbol of their own resurrection.<sup>63</sup>

It might be then argued that in the raising of Jairus’ dead daughter Mark sees the proleptic announcement of the resurrection of Jesus<sup>64</sup> as well as the resurrection of all believers in Jesus,<sup>65</sup> which is nothing else but a resurrection of the messianic Israel. In M.D. Hooker’s opinion, the contrast between physical death and final resurrection, found in the story about the raising of Jairus’ daughter,

<sup>63</sup> M.D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (Black’s New Testament Commentary; London: Continuum 1991) 147-148.

<sup>64</sup> Amy-Jill Levine (“Discharging Responsibility,” 387) argues: “Women’s bodies thus provide a model for the body of Christ; women’s suffering provides the model for the suffering of Christ, and women’s healing provides the model for the resurrection of the Christ.”

<sup>65</sup> Brooks (*Mark*, 94) states: “Almost certainly Mark wanted his readers/hearers to see in the resurrection of the girl a preview of the resurrection of Christians.”

is precisely “this contrast which is symbolized in this story.”<sup>66</sup> Once again, resorting to the criteria of symbolic analysis, one can easily find the OT traditions referring to God who is the initiator and power behind the resurrection of Israel (see Ezek 37).

### 1.12. Jesus' Garment

Jesus' cloak, which is touched by the hemorrhaging woman, symbolized Jesus himself. The woman wants to touch only his garments (5:27-28). Indeed, Jesus asked: “Who touched my clothes?” (5:30). His disciples, however, interpret this question as “Who touched me?” (5:31), demonstrating functional identity between Jesus' garments and his person.<sup>67</sup> In the OT, there are cases of symbolism connected with garment and the power it designates (e.g. Elijah's cloak). In general, dress carried a symbolic importance in ancient Israelite society.<sup>68</sup>

### 1.13. Jesus' Hands and the Girl's Hand

Jesus is invited by Jairus to lay on his hands upon his sick daughter (5:23). Commenting on the Gospel of Mark, Alfred Plummer noted that “as a symbol of blessings the imposition of the hand aided the sufferer's faith, and Christ often used it (1:41; 6:5; 7:32; 8:23.25).”<sup>69</sup> Meeting the criterion of convention probability, the symbolic act of laying-on of hands, a common practice in the ancient world (see 1QapGen 20.20-22.28-29), is indeed widely attested in biblical tradition, carrying both positive (see Gen 48:14-17.20) and negative (see Lv 24:14) connotations. In the NT, as noted by R.H. Stein, this gesture “often involves passing on blessing” (see Mark 10:16; Matt 19:13.15; Acts 6:6; 8:17.19; 9:17; 13:3; 19:6; 1 Tim 5:22) or “bringing about a healing” (see Mark 1:31.41; 5:41; 6:5; 7:32; 8:23.25; Luke 4:40; 13:13; 22:51; Acts 9:12.17; 28:8).<sup>70</sup> In the OT, God's hand

<sup>66</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 150.

<sup>67</sup> Marc Girard (*Symboles bibliques*, 1783), commenting on our passage, noted: “On constate une fois de plus la continuité symbolique entre la personne et son habillement.” For more on the meaning of Jesus' garment in this episode, see L.G. Tack, “Cleansed in the Wine of the Passion. On the Role of Jesus' Garment in the Story of the Hemorrhaging Woman,” *The Woman with the Blood Flow (Mark 5,24-34). Narrative, Iconic, and Anthropological Spaces* (ed. B. Baert) (Art & Religion 2; Leuven – Walpole, MA: Peeters 2014) 51-80.

<sup>68</sup> Douglas R. Edwards (“Dress and Ornamentation,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* [ed. D.N. Freedman] [New York: Doubleday 1992] II, 235) notes: “the biblical tradition illustrates the symbolic power that dress played in social, political, and religious arenas of the day.”

<sup>69</sup> A.A. Plummer, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1914) 147.

<sup>70</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 266.

or God's right hand (e.g. Ps 63:9), as well as God's finger, are all common anthropomorphisms used to describe God's powerful saving intervention in Israel's history.<sup>71</sup>

Interestingly enough, Jesus did not lay his hands on Jairus' daughter, but instead he grasped her hand. The syntagma κρατέω + χεῖρ (Gen. sing.) occurs three times in Mark (1:31; 5:41; 9:27), always in the context of healing resulting in the raising up of a healed person, which is expressed by the verb ἐγείρω. The syntagma κρατέω + χεῖρ (Gen. sing.) occurs only three times in the Septuagint, always describing God's powerful saving intervention (Gen 19:16 [here God is impersonated by angels]; Ps 72:23; Isa 42:6). In my opinion, the Markan use of this syntagma could be an allusion to this image of the saving God, attested both in Ps 72:23 (LXX) and in Isa 42:6 (LXX).

Psalms 72 is a praise for the goodness of God toward Israel (72:1). The Psalmist gives thanks to God for being relieved of oppressors. God's saving action came, as God "seized the right hand" (ἐκράτησας τῆς χειρὸς τῆς δεξιᾶς) of the Psalmist (72:23). In the same Psalm one finds many other themes which likewise correspond to the themes found in the Markan narrative: "daughter Zion" (72:28; cf. Mark 5:23.34.35), proclaiming God's promises (72:28; contrasted with Jesus' request of not proclaiming the miracle in Mark 5:43), putting the Psalmist's hope in the Lord (72:28; cf. having faith in the Lord Jesus in Mark 5:34.36), being asleep (72:20; cf. Mark 5:39), and becoming scourged (μαστιγώω) all day long (72:14; cf. Mark 5:29 – μάστιγος for an extended period of time). Further, the Markan theme of the woman's ritual impurity might correspond to "becoming beastlike" in God's sight (Ps 72:22). The theme of the woman's death in the Markan narrative might correspond to the psalmic idea that all those who are far from God will perish and die, those who whored away (72:27).

The symbolic value of Jesus' gesture of grasping the hand of Jairus' daughter might be even more evident when it is seen as an allusion to Isa 42:6. In this oracle God takes hold of the hand of his servant (κρατήσω τῆς χειρὸς σου) to strengthen him and making him a covenant to humanity and a light to nations. The Markan literary context likewise talks about a mission among the Gentiles (5:1-20). This Isaianic servant is explicitly identified as a corporate personality of Israel, Jacob (42:1). The image from Isa 42:6 is parallel to the one found in Isa 41:13, where God is grasping the right hand (ὁ κρατῶν τῆς δεξιᾶς σου) of Israel, Jacob, in order to help and set free. In view of the above, there is no doubt that an image of Jesus taking Jairus daughter's hand can be another substantial premise for our proposal of a symbolical reading of the Markan episode.

71 According to John A.W. Haas (*Annotations on the Gospel according to St. Mark* [New York: The Christian Literature 1895] 94) Jesus' gesture "was to Jairus not only symbolical of transference of power, but thought of in a magical manner." Haas also argued that "to prevent this magical misinterpretation Christ used the laying on of hands rarely."



### 1.14. Helplessness of Physicians

Mark focuses also on the helplessness or inadequacy of physicians (5:26). In fact, the woman with the issue of blood has only gotten worse due to the doctor's ministrations. Markan information about the powerlessness of doctors "is not just a literary trope," as noted by J. Marcus, because ancient literary witnesses "make clear that some ancient treatments for menstrual disorders were of that sort that were as likely to harm as to help the patient."<sup>72</sup> The same helplessness is obvious in the case of Jairus's daughter who is already dead (see a bitter comment in 5:35 about the futility of the Teacher's intervention). This Markan image of inadequacy of medical treatments juxtaposed with Jesus' powerful interventions, comparable only to God's way of acting, might be an allusion to the OT image of helpless doctors versus the healing power of God. Biblical traditions on many occasions underline the inadequacy of medicine or helplessness of physicians (see Job 13:4; Jer 8:22; Tob 2:10; Sir 10:10). The Septuagint in a few places introduces an image of physicians (ιατροί) who cannot raise up a dead person (see Isa 26:14 LXX; Ps 87:11 LXX, Odes Sol. 5:14). At the same time, in the biblical traditions YHWH alone is pictured as the healer of Israel (see the famous statements: ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι κύριος ὁ ἰώμενός σε – "For I am the Lord who heals you" in Exod 15:26 and "[YHWH] who heals all your diseases" in Ps 103:3).<sup>73</sup> King Asa of Judah, afflicted with a foot disease, had sought help from physicians (see 2 Chr 16:12). The Chronicler clearly disapproves of his trust in doctors alone and his tragic lack of confidence in God of Israel.

The two Markan women symbolize the people of Israel, who can be healed and restored to life by God alone, as there is no god besides Jesus. A few OT passages could be alluded to or echoed in this Markan theological conclusion. Jeremiah 8:22 (LXX) describes the helplessness of doctors who cannot heal the daughter, God's people, namely Israel. This oracle could be echoed in the healing of the hemorrhaging woman, called by Jesus "daughter" and representing Israel. In Job 5:18 we read about God's hands that give healing, a passage that might be alluded to in Jairus's request of laying Jesus' hands on his daughter. The Markan image of Jesus in these episodes might also evoke Deut 32:39 with the description of the God of Israel, who makes alive and heals, since there is no god besides Him and there is none that can deliver out of God's hand. Mark's narrative might echo also Jer 30:17, where God heals his bride, Zion, as well as Hos 6:1-2, where Israel is healed and raised up from death by God.

<sup>72</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 358.

<sup>73</sup> See also 2 Kgs 20:5-8; Ps 107:20; 147:3; Isa 19:22; 57:18-19; 61:1; Jer 33:6; Hos 11:3 LXX; Wis 16:12. For more on physicians in the OT, see A. Piwowar, "Respect for the Doctor (Sir 38:1-3)," *BibAn* 10/1 (2020) 32-38.

### 1.15. The Name Jairus

Rudolf Pesch advanced a hypothesis that the name Jairus – a name known already in the OT<sup>74</sup> – comes from the Hebrew יאִיר (meaning “he enlightens,” “he gives light”) or יעִיר (“he awakens,” “he arises”).<sup>75</sup> As such, this name can bear a symbolic value, having as the subject both God and Jairus himself. In the first case, God, acting in Jesus, enlightens Jairus, strengthening his faith after he received a message about his daughter’s death (5:36). Jesus, God’s agent, also awakens Jairus’ daughter, which Jesus himself interprets as awaking from sleep (5:39). Taking Jairus as the subject, his faith enlightens whole helpless situation. Moreover, Jairus’ name can be a subtle and allusive anticipation of awaking his daughter. In fact, it is Jairus’ faith in Jesus that awakens his daughter from the sleep of death; in the same way, it was the faith of the hemorrhaging woman that made her “saved” (5:34). For this reason, I cannot agree with V. Taylor who unconvincingly refutes the symbolic explanation of Jairus’s name: “The appropriateness of the symbolism, however, is not obvious; it is the daughter who is awakened and not by Jairus.”<sup>76</sup>

Pondering the criterion of textual probability, one could side with Guelich’s opinion that the symbolic use of Jairus’ name “is subtle at best.”<sup>77</sup> Indeed, it could seem hardly possible that the Greek-speaking audience of Mark’s Gospel might be familiar with the Hebrew meaning of Jairus’s name. Mark many times translates his Hebrew and Aramaic terms for the Gentile element among his addressees. Nevertheless, J. Marcus rightly noted that “[m]ost of Mark’s minor characters, including the two females healed in our story, are anonymous. The

<sup>74</sup> There are three persons with this name: (1) Jair, son of Manasseh (Num 32:41); (2) Jair, the Gileadite, one of the “minor judges” (Jud 10,3-5); and (3) Jair, father of Mordecai (Est 2:5).

<sup>75</sup> R. Pesch, “Kleinere Beiträge: Jāirus (Mk 5,22 / Lk 8,41),” *BZ* 14 (1970) 252-256.

<sup>76</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 287. The allegorical interpretation of Jairus’ name did not begin with Rudolf Pesch, but was widely attested among ancient and medieval commentators. For example, Bede the Venerable (*Exp. Marc.* 2.5.22) argued: “he is aptly named Jairus, i.e. one who enlightens, or who is enlightened [*id est illuminans sive illuminatus*], because he received words of life to give to us. Thus through them he enlightens others, and was himself enlightened by the Holy Spirit, whereby he was able to write or teach the lifegiving precepts.” Arie W. Zwiep (“Jairus”, 356) made an elaborated comment in this regard: “the alleged meaning of the name Jairus, ‘enlightening’ or ‘enlightened’, an interpretation which can be traced back to Jerome (*Nom. hebr.* ‘Iairus illuminans vel illuminatus’), often led to statements about the enlightening function of the Mosaic Law and the indispensable enlightenment by the Holy Spirit: Christianus stabulensis (ninth century), *Matt.* 33; anon. (from *Scriptores Celtigenae*) (seventh century), *Exp. Marc.* 5; Heiricus Autissiodorensis (ninth century), *Homiliae per circulum anni. Pars aestiva, Hom.* 45; Hrabanus Maurus (eight/ninth century), *Exp. Matt.* 3; also Sedulius Scotus (mid-ninth century), *Matt.* 1.1.9; Paschasius Radbertus (eight/ninth century), *Exp. Matt.* 12.5; Thomas Aquinas, *In Marc.* 5.2; *In Luc.* 8.7; *In Matt.* 9.4 (quoting Rabanus). An exception is an anonymous eight-century writer (from *Scriptores Hiberniae minores*), who suggests the name Jairus means ‘Helper’ (‘Iairus adiutor interpretatur’) (*Comm. Luc.* 8).”

<sup>77</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1–8*:26, 296.

inclusion of Jairus' name, therefore, may mean that it is significant."<sup>78</sup> In searching for its importance, we should note that Jairus prostrates himself before Jesus and implores him earnestly, being confident that Jesus has power over disease. As E. LaVerdiere observed, "his attitude contrasts sharply that of the scribes and the Pharisees, who refused to recognize Jesus' authority and even attributed his power to the prince of demons (see 2:6-7.16-17.24; 3:6.22)."<sup>79</sup> Jairus becomes a model figure of faith. By means of the literary intercalation, Jairus' faith is paralleled with the faith of the hemorrhaging woman. They both serve as models of faith, which brings healing and life. Such a faith should be embraced by the reader of Mark's Gospel, and such a faith is a sign of the people of God, Israel. If God and God's agent, Jesus, enlighten and awaken, so Jairus and Israel.

Referring to the criterion of convention probability, the OT is permeated with instances of symbolic names (e.g. Hosea's children). In the NT, including Mark, the most famous case is Peter, the symbolic name given to Simon (see Mark 3:15). Finally, the symbolic identity of Jairus, as representative of Israel, invites a symbolic reading also of his daughter, another representation of Israel.

### 1.16. Jairus' Social Position

Mark evidently focuses on the term ἀρχισυνάγωγος ("leader of the synagogue") because it appears four times in the episode (5:22.35.36.38).<sup>80</sup> The narration underlines the social role played by Jairus. Mark indeed does not introduce this figure saying "Jairus, one of the synagogue rulers," but "one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus." The name Jairus and the person of Jairus as such play a subordinated role in comparison with his position that he had in local society.<sup>81</sup> Jairus, defined as ἀρχισυνάγωγος, might be quite naturally interpreted as a representative of Israel, described metaphorically in Isaiah as the light to the nations

<sup>78</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 356.

<sup>79</sup> LaVerdiere, *The Beginning*, 135.

<sup>80</sup> The term ἀρχισυνάγωγος may describe a person "responsible for supervising worship services, caring for the scrolls, running the weekly school, keeping the congregation faithful to the Law, distributing alms, and administering the care of the building" – B.B. Barton, *Mark* (Life Application Bible Commentary; Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers 1994) 140. In a broader sense this term designated then a leader of a local Jewish community, but also a member of the class of people charged with administrative duties. Jairus could be one of the several rulers of this particular Galilean village (see 5:22), although J. Mateos and F. Camacho (*Marco*, 451) argue that in Jewish territories there was only one ruler in each synagogue, while in the diaspora there were several (see Acts 13:15). Jairus' position does not necessarily imply a life of affluence and membership in an influential elite. There is no doubt, however, that his person represents a group, population, village, a local community of Israelites.

<sup>81</sup> LaVerdiere, *The Beginning*, 134.

(42:6). Jairus, or rather his whole restored household, is then called to enlighten by its faith and at the same time to awaken faith in others.

Referring to the criterion of convention probability, the word συναγωγή occurs over 200 times in the LXX, standing in some 130 cases for ἡγε, which denotes “the national, legal and cultic community of Israel.”<sup>82</sup> Despite the predominant technical meaning (συναγωγή as a building), in the NT this noun may also denote a Christian assembly (see Jas 2:2) or a congregation of Jews (see Acts 13:43).

### 1.17. Jairus’ House

“The house of the synagogue ruler” (5:38) might be another symbol of dying Israel. According to J. Mateos and F. Camacho, “Defining the house by Jairus’ office and not by his name gives this house special status; it is no longer a house of a family, but a place of official religious institution.”<sup>83</sup> The two Spanish exegetes want to read into this pericope a contrast between two houses of Israel, the old one and the new. The old “house of Israel,” represented by Jairus’ house, is filled with death, tumult, weeping, loud wailing and distress (5:38-39). This house is contrasted with the new house of Israel, where faith in Jesus is the dominant element (see 2:1.11; 3:20; 5:19; 7:17; 8:26; 9:28). Jesus’ intervention turns this old “house of Israel” into the new one, where life and joy are restored.

Investigating the context of the entire Gospel of Mark, Elisabeth S. Malbon noted that “house” functions as dominant architectural marker and as such is distinguished from “synagogue” and “temple.” In the first portion of Mark the architectural space in which Jesus is most frequently placed is the synagogue (for the last time in 6:2), but “the actions enclosed by a house parallel those enclosed by a synagogue: healing, teaching or preaching, controversy.”<sup>84</sup> In effect, as Malbon explains, “movement toward mediation of the opposition synagogue versus house – and, in a larger sense, movement toward mediation of the opposition sacred versus profane – is manifest in the Markan narrative by the takeover of functions of the former by the latter.”<sup>85</sup> The narration about the resuscitation of Jairus’ daughter, along with its immediate context of the controversy in the synagogue in Nazareth (6:1-6), is a turning point in this shift of functions and meanings. As Malbon said: “Power is not with the ruler of the synagogue, but with Jesus in the house. [...] From then on the house is the chief architectural centre for teaching, replacing the synagogue as it were. In terms of the fundamental opposition un-

82 W. Schrage, “συναγωγή κτλ,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. G. Kittel – G. Friedrich) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1971) VII, 802.

83 Mateos – Camacho, *Marco*, 479.

84 E.S. Malbon, “TH OIKIA AYTOY. Mark 2.15 in Context,” *NTS* 31 (1985) 285.

85 Malbon, “TH OIKIA AYTOY,” 287.

derlaying the architectural spaces, the sacred realm is inadequate to contain this 'new teaching' (1.27), and it overflows into the secular realm."<sup>86</sup> In the final part of the Markan narrative, the temple is the dominant architectural space, yet the house again is presented as a center of Jesus' activity. Admittedly, Jesus only visits the temple but he stays at a house in Bethany (14,3). As Malbon noted,

In the house, rather than in the temple, Jesus becomes 'the anointed one'. As during Jesus' ministry the house had come to oppose the synagogue, so during Jesus' passion the more holy temple opposes the house and rejects and is rejected by the one identified with it. Even at the metaphorical level of Marks' gospel, the temple is rejected, house affirmed. [...] [M]ay it not be that the house, which replaces the synagogue and stands in opposition to the doomed temple in Mark, does suggest the early Christian community? With the destruction of the temple (13. 2) and rejection in the synagogue (13. 9), the Christian community must come together in 'house churches'. The sacred structures of temple and synagogue are no longer central; the new community gathers in a house to experience, witness to, and await 'the Lord of the house'.<sup>87</sup>

The symbolic reading of ὁ οἶκος τοῦ ἀρχισυναγώγου in Mark 5:38 easily meets the criterion of convention probability since the syntagma ὁ οἶκος (τοῦ) Ἰσραὴλ occurs 61 times in LXX and twice in the NT (Acts 2:36; 7:42). One might speculate that Jairus (who is now called "the father of the child" – 5:40) along with "the mother" (5:40) and their resuscitated "child" (παῖδιον occurs four times in 5:39-41) could be taken as a nucleus of the new family of God, a symbolic representation of the restored families/households of the Messianic people of Israel.

### 3. Contextual Probability

The congruity between the meaning of the literary context and the results of the symbolic interpretation of a given text constitutes the third criterion in establishing the credibility of the symbolic analysis. Both the immediate literary context as well as the global context of the Gospel of Mark should corroborate the meaning of the pericope as revealed by means of the symbolic analysis.

<sup>86</sup> Malbon, "TH OIKIA AYTOY," 287.

<sup>87</sup> Malbon, "TH OIKIA AYTOY," 287-288. For an in-depth study of household imagery in Mark, see M.R. Trainor, *The Quest for Home. The Household in Mark's Community* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 2001). See also F. Manns, "Le thème de la maison dans l'évangile de Marc," *RSR* 66 (1992) 1-17.

#### 4.1. Immediate Context

The pericope analyzed here is juxtaposed with the exorcism in the region of the Gerasenes (preceding context: 5:1-20) and also the rejection of Jesus in his hometown (following context: 6:1-6). These three pericopes, taken together, might be seen as a triptych. Its left wing, the story about healing a demoniac in a gentile region, is also embedded with symbolism, as already elaborated by some commentators.<sup>88</sup> The presence of symbolism in the left wing may imply and invite its use also in the center of the triptych. The story in the left wing describes the encounter between Jesus and the gentile world, while the center and the right wings describe his encounter with the Jewish world. Nevertheless, the common theological issue of the whole triptych is faith in Jesus. In the left and central panels of the triptych there is a common theme, that of exclusion from, and inclusion into, God's people of Israel. The restoration to life of two women, both being "outside" of their society either by being impure or dead, "would have been of special interest to the Gentiles, since they, too, had once been 'outsiders', excluded from the community of God's people."<sup>89</sup> Both stories, the restoration of two women and the restoration of the Gerasene demoniac, are the harbinger of the renewed people of God consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. The only way of access into the renewed Israel is faith in Jesus. In the triptych's right-hand panel, Jesus' visit to Nazareth, there is a description of self-exclusion from the messianic community of God's people by the lack of faith in Jesus. The central part of the triptych focuses on faith in the messianic mission of Jesus and creates a contrast with two wings of the triptych, which illustrates the unbelief of both Gentiles (who plead with Jesus to go away from their region – 5:17) and Jews (whose unbelief amazed Jesus himself – 6:6). The very center of the triptych illustrates then the model figures of faith and the salvific consequences of their faith. These three model figures are Jairus, his daughter and the woman with the flow of blood. All these three characters represent the faithful-to-God remnant of Israel, the beginnings of the renewed Israel, and members of the messianic Kingdom of God.<sup>90</sup> Larry

<sup>88</sup> See R.D. Kotansky, "Jesus and Heracles in Cádiz (τὰ Γάδειρα): Death, Myth, and Monsters at the 'Strait of Gibraltar' (Mark 4:35–5:43)," *Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Bible and Culture: Essays in Honor of Hans Dieter Betz* (ed. A. Yarbro Collins) (Atlanta, PA: Scholars 1998) 160-229 (a symbolism of passing to the other side of the sea to the land of death); Standaert, *Marc*, 394-396 (baptismal symbolism). Many authors (e.g. Horsley, *Hearing*, 140; Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 351-352) find in the narrative political nuances of anti-Roman symbolism.

<sup>89</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 148.

<sup>90</sup> See a comment by Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2000) 176: "in [Mark] 5:21–43 he [Jesus] symbolically demonstrates that he is the one who heals Israel of her uncleanness and, by restoring the child to life, signals the inauguration of the promises of Yahweh's new creational restoration of Israel."



W. Hurtado captured well the symbolical purport of our pericope as revealed in dialogue with its immediate literary context:

Both of these incidents [Mark 5:21–43] happen in Jewish territory. The little girl is the daughter of a leader of a synagogue, and 5:21 tells us that Jesus has returned from the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, the gentile area where the demoniac was cured. These two incidents are followed by the rejection of Jesus in Nazareth, his home town, and they seem to prepare the reader to view that rejection as all the more unwarranted. But these miracles, together with the rejection, also seem to prefigure symbolically the final rejection of Jesus, culminating in the trial and crucifixion. Is it insignificant that the woman had a *twelve*-year ailment, and that this number has a long biblical significance as symbolizing Israel? And the girl, the *twelve*-year-old daughter of a synagogue leader, is doubly linked with Israel. In other words, the sequence of miracles among those identified with Israel, followed by rejection in Jesus' own village, affords the informed reader with a glimpse of the outcome of Jesus' ministry to Israel.<sup>91</sup>

### 3.1. Global Context

Looking at a still larger literary context, encompassing the whole narrative of the gospel, Mark creates a contrast between the Twelve and other male disciples on the one hand and female disciples of Jesus and four model figures of women (the hemorrhaging woman, the Syrophoenician woman, the poor widow, and the women anointing Jesus's head in Bethany) on the other. The preceding context of our pericope indicates the unbelief of the Twelve (4:40), who by definition symbolize Israel. In our pericope also, Jesus' male disciples (including the Twelve) also do not understand and have doubt about his divine identity, denying his ability to identify a person that had touched his garment (5:31). Such a negative presentations of male disciples conform with their overall presentation in the Gospel of Mark, where they are depicted as doubting, unbelieving, and finally departing from Jesus. Conversely, the women who meet with Jesus are presented in a very unambiguously positive light, playing even model roles within the narrative.<sup>92</sup> This overall positive image of women in the Gospel of Mark invites and

<sup>91</sup> L.W. Hurtado, *Mark* (UBCS; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 2011) 87-88.

<sup>92</sup> See E.S. Malbon, "Fallible Followers. Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark," *Semeia* 28 (1983) 29-48; M.A. Beavis, "Women as Models of Faith in Mark," *BTB* 18 (1988) 3-9; E.S. Malbon, "The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Marcan Characterization," *JBL* 108 (1989) 259-281; J.F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus. Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel* (JSNTSup 102; Sheffield: JSOT Press 1994); E.S. Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus. Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2000); S. Miller, *Women in*

indirectly corroborates the symbolic interpretation of the two female characters in Mark 5:21-43 as representatives of Israel.

#### 4. Conclusion

Our symbolic analysis of Mark 5:21-43 aimed at presenting the two main female characters as representatives of Israel. Seventeen different elements lend themselves to this symbolic interpretation and, taken together, produce a rather strong cumulative argument in favor of a symbolic reading of the two female figures. All these elements met the criteria of both textual and convention probabilities. The third criterion of contextual probability is also met because the message of the episode, revealed by means of symbolic analysis, is congruent with the message of the immediate literary context of the pericope and also the global context of the entire Gospel of Mark.

The lack of contradiction between the literal and symbolic meanings is an important premise in the process of evaluating the reliability of symbolic analysis. The main theme of Mark 5:21-43, encapsulated in the literal sense of the text, is the salvific effect of faith as demonstrated by the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus. Their faith results in healing and resuscitation. The two intercalated stories focus also on the divine identity of Jesus, while the issue of cultic purity and impurity lurks in the background. This literal sense of the pericope is in no way contradicted or undermined by the message or sense of the episode further extracted by means of symbolic analysis. While the literal sense emphasizes the centrality of the theme of faith and the unique divine identity of Jesus, the symbolic meaning broadens the interpretative horizons of this text. No longer is it just a story about two specific women, about their healing and resuscitation, but a record of the interaction between God, coming in the person of Jesus, and his people, Israel. Both female heroes, as described by Mark, are in situations marked by helplessness. The hemorrhaging woman cannot find any cure for her ailment, and Jairus' daughter, bereft of any effective help, dies. Both women are found in a state of barrenness: one due to her illness, the second on account of death. Thus both women symbolize Israel being in a liminal situation. It is Israel which suffers, produces no life, and eventually dies. But Jesus' intervention restores fecundity and life to both women. On the symbolic level, Israel is healed and raised from death – and, regaining new life, is able to *give* life. Crucially, it

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*Mark's Gospel* (LNTS 259; London: Clark 2004); A. Kubiś, "The Poor Widow's Mites. A Contextual Reading of Mark 12:41-44," *BibAn* 3 (2013) 339-381; S. Miller, "Women Characters in Mark's Gospel," *Character Studies and the Gospel of Mark* (ed. C.W. Skinner – M.R. Hauge) (LNTS 483; London: Bloomsbury Clark 2014) 174-193.

is faith in Jesus, the Messiah, that is the key element in gaining this fruitfulness and new life. Mark emphasizes both Jesus' passivity and the activity of Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman. Indeed, their faith is the only means of gaining life and fertility. The pragmatics of the episode are then identical in both the literal and symbolic interpretations: only Jesus can give life, healing and fecundity, but in order to receive them, Jairus and hemorrhaging woman need to express their faith, and act *out of* their faith.

J. Mateos and F. Camacho argue that each women represents a different part of Israel's society, which at the time of Jesus faced opposition from religious institutions of Judaism. In the case of the hemorrhaging woman, it is a marginalized stratum of the society, while with Jairus' daughter (by association with her father), it is a group integrated into religious institutions.<sup>93</sup> As to the salient detail of twelve years, in the case of the hemorrhaging woman it designates the past of marginalized people, but for the young girl it stands for the future of the new Israel. The girl's span of life corresponds precisely to the time of the woman's ailment. It was then the institution of the synagogue, influenced by Pharisees, that provoked the marginalization of Israel.<sup>94</sup> In my opinion, by means of merism, the two women, standing at opposite extremes of the Jewish religious system (cultic impurity versus temple cult and synagogue worship), together represent the whole people of Israel, part marginalized (excluded from cult and from religious and social life) and part institutionally connected (and generally hostile toward Jesus). Whole Israel is desperately in need of her Messiah. By meeting that Messiah in faith, Israel – God's Bride and light to the nations – can be healed, restored to life, and equipped to continue the mission of the earthly Jesus, who, we are told, entered the Gerasene region in order to bring the light of faith to the Gentiles.

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<sup>93</sup> Mateos – Camacho, *Marco*, 447-486.

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