Reading (in) a Quadriform Cosmos: Gospel Books in the Early Christian Bibliographic Imagination[1]

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This article has been accepted for publication by the *Journal of Early Christian Studies* and will appear in print in 2022.

ABSTRACT

Early Christian thinkers developed the widespread linguistic cosmology of the Roman Mediterranean in a novel way in order to advance a specific bibliographic project, aligning the emergent fourfold Gospel with the structure of the physical cosmos. Employing interlocking concepts from the disciplines of meteorology, geography, music, mathematics, and astronomy, a number of figures—including Irenaeus, Origen, Ephrem, Eusebius, Fortunatianus, Augustine, and Maximus—imagined a Gospel corpus consisting of precisely four texts. Number provided a way to articulate the coherence of the fourfold Gospel—both with itself and with the rest of the world. By situating both familiar and neglected evidence in the context of ancient cosmology, I argue that early Christians theorized a divinely ordained correspondence between fourfold Gospel and quadriform cosmos.

1. I express my gratitude to mentors and colleagues who have improved this article by generously offering their insights at various stages of its development, including Warren Campbell, Matthew Crawford, J. Columcille Dever, Stephanie Frampton, Alexander Hsu, Robin Jensen, Samuel Johnson, Blake Leyerle, David Lincicum, Candida Moss, Gretchen Reydams-Schils, Paul Saieg, Blossom Stefaniw, Paul Wheatley, and several anonymous reviewers. An earlier form of this article was presented at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature; my participation was made possible by the generous support of the Notebaert Professional Development Fund at the University of Notre Dame. This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 891569, "Expanding the Gospel according to Matthew: Continuity and Change in Early Gospel Literature," at the University of Oxford.

OUT OF BOOKS, A WORLD

"Now I consider the four Gospels to be, as it were, the elements of the church's faith, from which elements the whole world consists" (ἐγὼ δ' οἶμαι ὅτι καὶ τεσσάρων ὄντων τῶν εὐαγγελίων οἱονεὶ στοιχείων τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐκκλησίας—ἐξ ὧν στοιχείων ὁ πᾶς συνέστηκε κόσμος [. . .]).[2] Thus declared Origen of Alexandria in the early third century C.E. Origen, like many other early Christians, thought that four particular Gospels constituted a single coherent whole. Others imagined different configurations of Gospel material. As Origen polemically asserted, "the church has four Gospels; heretics have many."[3] Yet, from the second century onward, many Christian thinkers understood four particular texts as an authoritative Gospel corpus.[4] The articulation of this fourfold Gospel composed of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (not always in that order) was a pivotal development in the history of early Christian reading.[5] Origen's comments thus invite an important but neglected question: What conceptual

2. Or., *Jo.* 1.4.21 (SC 120bis:66–67, ed. Blanc). In a creative theological move, Origen merges the metaphor of the fourfold Gospel as elementally constitutive of the cosmos with a Pauline soteriological idiom (using the language of 2 Cor 5:19); he continues by describing the world as "reconciled to God in Christ, as Paul says: 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself'" (ἐν Χριστῷ καταλλαγεὶς τῷ θεῷ, καθά φησιν ὁ Παῦλος· Θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσων ἑαυτῷ). Unfortunately, Origen does not further develop the analogy between fourfold Gospel and quadriform cosmos. Situating Paul's language of reconciliation within broader cosmological frameworks, see Nicola Denzey Lewis, "Hellenistic Astronomy in Early Christianities," in *Hellenistic Astronomy: The Science in Its Contexts*, ed. Alan C. Bowen and Francesca Rochberg (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 551–71 at 554.

3. *Ecclesia quatuor habet evangelia, haeresis plurima.* Or., *Hom. 1–39 in Lc.* 1.2 (preserved only in Jerome's translation, SC 87:100–101, ed. Crouzel et al.). Origen goes on to discuss several other instances of failed Gospel writing. Yet even for Origen, a fourfold Gospel does not require that only four Gospels be read. Of the figures discussed here, Origen (e.g., *Comm. in Mt.* 15.14; *Jo.* 2.15.87), Eusebius (*Theoph.* 4.22 [Syriac]), and Jerome (*Vir. ill.* 2; *Matt. ad* 6:11; 12:13; 23:35; 27:16; 27:51) approvingly cited other Gospel texts beyond Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. While Ephrem primarily employed Tatian's Gospel, he mentions the fourfold "Gospel of the Separated" (Matthew R. Crawford, "The Fourfold Gospel in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian," *Hugoye* 18 [2015]: 9–51). Even those theorizing a fourfold Gospel were aware of other Gospels and other practices of Gospel reading.

4. Cf. Oscar Cullmann, "Die Pluralität der Evangelien als theologisches Problem im Altertum," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 1 (1945): 23–42; Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 153–76; Theo K. Heckel, *Vom Evangelium des Markus zum viergestaltigen Evangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999); Martin Hengel, *Die vier Evangelien und das eine Evangelium von Jesus Christus: Studien zu ihrer Sammlung und Entstehung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); Francis Watson, *The Fourfold Gospel: A Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

5. Moreover, this development is central to the formation of the collection we know as the New Testament itself.

resources did Origen and other early Christian thinkers employ to theorize the fourfold nature of this Gospel corpus?[6]

The early Christian bibliographic imagination aligned a fourfold Gospel with the quadriform structure of the physical cosmos. Irenaeus, Origen, Ephrem, Eusebius, Fortunatianus, Augustine, Maximus, and others each employed interlocking fourfold metaphors drawn from meteorology, geography, music, mathematics, and astronomy in order to imagine a Gospel corpus consisting of precisely four texts. Although scholars have listed fourfold tropes and discussed particular passages, no one has offered an integrated and sustained analysis of the varied images of Gospel fourfoldness from late antiquity.[7] Many of these fourfold figures continued to enjoy robust reception throughout the Middle Ages and, in some cases, up to the present.

Christians were not the first to discern parallel structures in language and cosmos.[8] Ancient sources from Plato's *Timaeus* onward propose that the world might be constructed

6. One might imagine that, had three or five texts emerged as a preferred Gospel corpus, Christian thinkers might have employed other concepts to think about number—for example, the varied threefold schemata of ancient philosophy (John D. Turner, "The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment: The Ascent of Mind and the Descent of Wisdom," *NT* 22 [1980]: 324–51 at 324–25) or the fivefold structure of the Pentateuch or of the five senses (cf. Iren., *Haer.* 2.24–25, on varied fivefold natural, linguistic, and biblical structures, discussed by Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Εὐαγγέλιον: Orality, Textuality, and the Christian Truth in Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*," *VC* 56 [2002]: 11–46 at 22–23).

7. I have attempted to identify as many relevant examples as possible from the first seven centuries CE, but—given the enormous popularity of these varied images for Gospel fourfoldness—it is likely that there are further examples that I have missed. A number of the Greek and Latin texts are collected in Helmut Merkel, *Die Pluralität der Evangelien als theologisches und exegetisches Problem in der alten Kirche* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1978). Most are omitted in Kurt Aland's similar collection of sources on ancient Gospel bibliography (*Synopsis quattuor evangeliorum: Locis parallelis evangeliorum apocryphorum et patrum adhibitis* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1964], 531–48). The most extensive recent investigation of fourfold thinking in early Christianity is Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 553–603, but Watson focuses on the four creatures and does not explore the broader range of fourfold phenomena or the quadriform cosmic logic in which they participate.

8. On the idea of κοσμός not only as order, but as the universe as an ordered whole, see Philipp Sidney Horky, "When did *Kosmos* Become the *Kosmos*?," in *Cosmos in the Ancient World*, ed. Philipp Sidney Horky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 22–41. Horky traces this idea to the Pythagoreanism of the fifth century BCE, but by late antiquity, it was well established throughout the Roman Mediterranean.

like—or even out of—text.[9] We find one of the most lucid expositions of this idea in Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, written in the first century B.C.E. As Stephanie Frampton writes, "[a]toms, [Lucretius] says, are like letters, and join in various combinations into all the world's physical bodies in just the same way that, in writing, we see letters come together into words and sentences."[10] Similarly, in light of the divine words of Gen 1, a passage attributed to the second-century B.C.E. Jewish thinker Aristobulus—and preserved through its reuse by late ancient Christians—argues that "the whole creation of the world is the words of God."[11] The late ancient rabbinic midrash *Genesis Rabbah* identifies a similar correspondence: In creation, God consulted the Torah in the same way that an architect uses a blueprint. Sacred text precedes and orders the cosmos.[12]

In late antiquity, cosmology provided a mode of textual knowledge. As Jeremy Schott explains, for many in late antiquity, "The world was something to be heard, read, and interpreted."[13] Blossom Stefaniw similarly argues that "[t]he cosmos has its own legibility and as

9. Pl., *Ti.* 48b–c. In the dialogue, the figure Timaeus himself rejects the correspondence between letters and elements, since he maintains that sub-elemental triangles (cf. *Ti.* 53b–56c) are even more fundamental than the four elements.

10. Stephanie Ann Frampton, *Empire of Letters: Writing in Roman Literature and Thought From Lucretius to Ovid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 55 (part of the chapter "The Text of the World," pp. 55–84). See especially Lucr. 1.196–98, 823–27, 907–14; 2.688–99, 1013–22. For Lucretius, the world is built out of atoms like language is built out of letters (*elementa*); both letters and atoms can be rearranged to make something different. Frampton does not think, however, that Lucretius sees the cosmos itself as linguistic. Others have taken the metaphor as reflecting a more fundamental relationship; see Paul Friedländer, "Pattern of Sound and Atomistic Theory in Lucretius," *AJP* 62 (1941): 16–34 and, more recently, Wilson H. Shearin, *The Language of Atoms: Performativity and Politics in Lucretius'* De rerum natura (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 123n60 ("an analogy, or something more than an analogy") and Barnaby Taylor, *Lucretius and the Language of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 119–24. Regardless of whether Lucretius's world is constructed *like* or *out of* language, linguistic phenomena provided a powerful way to understand the "nature of things." This advances Frampton's broader argument that written language structured Roman imperial knowing of the world. I am grateful to Stephanie Frampton for discussing a number of these ideas with me.

11. Δεῖ γὰρ λαμβάνειν τὴν θείαν φωνὴν οὐ ῥητὸν λόγον, ἀλλ' ἔργων κατασκευάς, καθὼς καὶ διὰ τῆς νομοθεσίας ἡμῖν ὅλην τὴν γένεσιν τοῦ κόσμου θεοῦ λόγους εἴρηκεν ὁ Μωσῆς (Aristobulus *apud* Eus., *P.e.* 13.12 [GCS 43/1, ed. Mras and des Places]; cf. Aristobulus *apud* Clement, *Str.* 5.99.3 [GCS 17:392.5–6, ed. Stählin]). I am grateful to Andrew Radde-Gallwitz for drawing my attention to these passages from Aristobulus.

12. *Gen. Rab.* 1.1; cf. *Gen. Rab.* 1.4; 1.10; 3.2.

13. Jeremy Schott, "Language," in *Late Ancient Knowing: Explorations in Intellectual History*, ed. C. M. Chin and Moulie Vidas (Berkeley: University of California, 2015), 58–79 at 58.

such is both structured like a text and structures all the texts which purport to represent it. The legibility of the late ancient cosmos gives textual study particular potency as a tool for knowing the world."[14] The late ancient Mediterranean world was made out of language.

Early Christian approaches to the fourfold Gospel emerged within this larger context, what Jeremy Schott describes as the "late ancient overdetermination of the cosmos as linguistic."[15] Yet, within this linguistic cosmology that discerned a relationship between word and world, early Christian engagement with Gospel literature was distinctive in two ways. First, Christians articulated the relationship between text and cosmos in an explicitly numerical logic.[16] Second, early Christian articulations of the numerical relationship between text and cosmos sought to organize a particular library of texts.[17]

Christian thinkers developed the widespread linguistic cosmology of the ancient Mediterranean in a novel way in order to advance a specific bibliographic project.[18] This early

14. Blossom Stefaniw, "Knowledge in Late Antiquity: What is it Made of and What Does it Make?," *Studies in Late Antiquity* 2 (2018): 266–93 at 271. Moreover, "[t]he work of acquiring knowledge by reading texts which are endowed with the capacity to reflect the cosmos is also a sympathetic practice. Cultivated reading and textual study belong in the same category in Late Antiquity as worship, magic, and astrology" (287). One might add philosophy, law, medicine, and mathematics to Stefaniw's list. For another example, see Andrew Jacobs's discussion of how Epiphanius connected cosmos, scripture, history, and language ("Epiphanius of Salamis and the Antiquarian's Bible," *JECS* 21 [2013]: 437–64, esp. 445). As Gillian Clark notes, discussing Augustine's bibliographic epistemology, "bookishness is a late antique characteristic" and not an exclusively Christian one ("City of Books: Augustine and the World as Text," in *The Early Christian Book*, ed. William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran [Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007], 117–39 at 133); cf. the other essays in the same volume. On the power of written language, see further David Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic," *Helios* 21 (1994): 189–221.

15. Schott, "Language," 58.

16. Here I build on Eva Mroczek's exploration of the non-enumerative significance of number. Discussing the eighty-one books of the Ethiopic canon, Mroczek observes that numbers can designate concepts of totality (*The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016], 161). Early Christians were not the only ones to coordinate text and cosmos by means of number. For similar discussion of number and bibliography in classical Chinese literature, see John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). I am grateful to Matthew Crawford for pointing me to this study.

17. The most extensive study of early Christian number theory is that of Joel Kalvesmaki, who discusses the fourfold Gospel only briefly (*The Theology of Arithmetic: Number Symbolism in Platonism and Early Christianity* [Washington: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013], 172–73 and 177–78).

18. By "bibliography," I mean the practice of organizing knowledge about real or imagined books; Christians and others in late antiquity employed bibliographical thinking as a way of organizing knowledge of the world more broadly. I develop the idea of late ancient bibliographic thinking in *Eusebius the Evangelist: Rewriting the Fourfold Gospel in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), ch. 1.

Christian cosmic-bibliographic imagination coheres with broader practices of ancient knowing that sought to integrate text and world. By analyzing the interconnected metaphorical registers in which varied thinkers imagined a fourfold Gospel, I uncover an overlooked dynamic in ancient Gospel bibliography—the coherence between sacred text and divinely-ordered cosmos.[19]

FOURFOLD GEOGRAPHY

The extant early Christian sources reveal a wide range of interlocking metaphors for a fourfold Gospel. In this article, I analyze these overlooked conceptual resources in order to illuminate the mode of bibliographic knowing in which they participate.

We turn first to the most famous image for the fourfold Gospel. In the late second century, Irenaeus of Lyons asked, "How indeed could the number of the Gospels be more or less?" (τί δήποτε οὔτε πλείονα οὔτε ἐλάττονα τὸν ἀριθμόν εἰσι τὰ εὐαγγέλια;).[20] Irenaeus imagined the Gospels in the fourfold physiognomy of heavenly creatures from the visions of Ezekiel (1:1–21) and John the Seer (Rev 4:7): "For the living creatures are quadriform," he asserted, and "the Gospel also is quadriform" (τετράμορφα γὰρ τὰ ζῷα, τετράμορφον καὶ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον). Irenaeus's heavenly bestiary remains enormously successful as an image for the fourfold Gospel, with enduring reception in literary texts and in mosaics, stained glass, illuminated manuscripts, and other media.[21] Yet the enormous reception of Irenaeus's

19. Here I build on recent discussions of ancient textuality and knowledge, especially William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran, eds., *The Early Christian Book* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007); C. M. Chin and Moulie Vidas, eds., *Late Ancient Knowing: Explorations in Intellectual History* (Berkeley: University of California, 2015); Stefaniw, "Knowledge"; Andrew M. Riggsby, *Mosaics of Knowledge: Representing Information in the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); The Postclassicisms Collective, *Postclassicisms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 113–27. On correspondence between book and world, see Clark, "City of Books"; Andrew M. Riggsby, "Guides to the Wor(l)d," in *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire*, ed. Jason König and Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 88–107.
20. Iren., *Haer.* 3.11.8 (SC 211:160–63, ed. Doutreleau and Rousseau). A Greek excerpt of *Haer.* 3.11.8 is preserved in Anast. S., *Qu. et resp.* 144; it diverges from the Latin text in minor details.
21. On Irenaeus's heavenly bestiary, see *inter alia* Theodor Zahn, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons und der altkirchlichen Literatur. II. Theil. Der Evangelienconmentar des Theophilus*

theriomorphic evangelist symbols has obscured the diverse metaphorical registers in which early Christians theorized a fourfold Gospel. These neglected fourfold metaphors are the focus of the present article.

While Irenaeus's discussion of the fourfold Gospel in *Haer.* 3.11.7–9 is a *locus classicus,* scholars focused on the emergence of a fourfold Gospel often ignore how Irenaeus thinks about the relationship between that corpus and the rest of the world. His arguments about the fourfold Gospel and quadriform cosmos are often denigrated as nothing more than capricious metaphor.[22] More recently, a few scholars—including Annette Reed, Francis Watson, and Sebastien Morlet—have broken from this dismissive trend.[23] Yet none of these scholars has

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von Antiochien (Erlangen: Deichert, 1883), 257–75; T. C. Skeat, "Irenaeus and the Four-Gospel Canon," *NT* 34 (1992): 194–99; Pier Franco Beatrice, "Per la storia dell'esegesi patristica del tetramorfo evangelico," in *San Marco : aspetti storici e agiografici : atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Venezia, 26-29 aprile 1994*, ed. Antonio Niero (Venice: Marsilio, 1996), 268–83; P.-M. Bogaert, "Les quatre vivants, l'Évangile et les évangiles," *Revue théologique de Louvain* 32 (2001): 457–78; Reed, "Εὐαγγέλιον," 38–42; Charles E. Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 34–42; Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 553–603; Watson, *Fourfold Gospel*, 44–45 and 90–95; Bernhard Mutschler, "Irenäus und die Evangelien: Literarische Rezeption 'des Herrn' und Anschluss an eine Vierertradition," in *Gospels and Gospel Traditions in the Second Century: Experiments in Reception*, ed. Jens Schröter, Tobias Nicklas, and Joseph Verheyden (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 217–52.

For the four creatures (with variations in the proposed identifications between evangelists and creatures), see *inter alia* Fortunat., *Comm. Ev., praef.* lines 6–25; Victor.-Poetov., *Apoc.* 4.4 (CSEL 49.54); *Tractatus de fabrica mundi* 3 (CSEL 49:4, ed. Hausleiter); Chromat., *Matt., praef.* 5–7; Ambr., *Luc., praef.* 3; 1.7–8; Epiph., *Mens.* 35 (64d–65a, Syriac ed. Dean); *App. ad ind. apost. discip.* (T. Schermann, ed., *Prophetarum vitae fabulosae* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1907], 128–31); Hier., *Ezech.* 1.1.10–11 *ad* Ezek 1:6–8; *Matt., praef.* 2–3; *Tract. Marc.* 1; *Apoc.* 4:4; Aug., *Cons.* 1.6.9; *Tract. ev. Io.* 36.5; Sedul., *Carm.* 1.356–59; Ps.-Ath., *Synops.* (PG 28:432.41); Eustrat., *Stat. anim.*, lines 628–30; Germ. CP, *H.e.* 32; Primas., *Apoc. ad* Rev 1:4. The four evangelist symbols continue to enjoy a rich reception beyond late antiquity.

22. Helmut Merkel notes that, for Irenaeus, "zeigen die Analogien aus Natur und Heilsgeschichte die Vierzahl als gottgewollt auf," but approvingly cites Oscar Cullmann's description of the fourfold figures as "artificial" ("gekünstelte") (Merkel, *Pluralität*, XIII; Cullmann, "Pluralität," 38). François Sagnard dismisses the fourfold figures as merely aesthetic (*Irénée de Lyon : Contre les hérésies, Livre III : Mise en lumière et réfutation de la prétendue "connaissance,"* SC 34 [Paris: Cerf, 1952], 193n2). As Edmon Gallagher and John Meade summarize in their recent survey, "scholars agree that Irenaeus's explanations for the fourfold Gospel are unlikely to impress modern readers" (*The Biblical Canon Lists From Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017], 33).

23. Reed notes that Irenaeus employs these varied metaphors to exhibit "the rhetorical interplay of multiplicity and unity," although she does not explore their underlying cosmic logic ("Εὐαγγέλιον," 44, cf. 38–42). Francis Watson defends the schema of the four creatures against the charge of "absurdity or arbitrariness," although he does not explore Irenaeus's other fourfold images (*Gospel Writing*, 553). Sebastien Morlet observes that "[m]onde, histoire, Écritures sont, pour Irénée, trois aspects indissociables de l'œuvre unique et harmonieuse de Dieu," and gestures toward the idea that Irenaeus understood the fourfold Gospel as corresponding to a fourfold natural order (*Symphonia: La concorde des textes et des doctrines dans la littérature grecque jusqu'à Origène* [Paris: Les belles lettres, 2019], 215 and 225–26).

connected Irenaeus's discussion to other theorizations of the fourfold Gospel in light of a quadriform cosmos. The implications for both bibliography and cosmology remain unexplored.

Irenaeus used varied fourfold images to envisage the Gospels.[24] The four biblical creatures corresponded to cosmic manifestations of quadriformity:

> Ἐπεὶ γὰρ τέσσαρα κλίματα τοῦ κόσμου ἐν ᾧ ἐσμὲν καὶ τέσσαρα καθολικὰ πνεύματα, κατέσπαρται δὲ ἡ ἐκκλησία ἐπὶ πάσης τῆς γῆς, στῦλος δὲ καὶ στήριγμα ἐκκλησίας τὸ εὐαγγέλιον καὶ Πνεῦμα ζωῆς, εἰκότως τέσσαρας ἔχειν αὐτὴν στύλους πανταχόθεν πνέοντας τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ ἀναζωπυροῦντας τοὺς ἀνθρώπους.
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> For since the world in which we exist has four regions and four universal winds, and the church is spread out across the whole earth, and the pillar and foundation of the church is the Gospel together with the Spirit of life, it is natural for her to have four pillars, in every direction breathing out incorruption and reviving humans.[25]

24. Irenaeus also connects the four creatures and four Gospels with a fourfold periodization of history. This fourfold history is, from Irenaeus's perspective, a kind of cosmic fourfoldness; as Paul Saieg notes, "Irenaeus does not contemplate the possibility of there being a hiatus between the scriptural text and a separate discourse about the 'events' that 'really happened' standing behind them—the whole is, instead, a seamless tapestry, a single ἱστορία" ("Lived Theology: Economy, Asceticism, and Spirit in Irenaeus and His Readers," *VC* 73 [2019]: 297–332 at 316n80). Here I focus on neglected metaphors that resonate in registers beyond the biblical text, but this is not to attribute to Irenaeus or others a stark division between scriptural and cosmic realities. To the contrary, my objective is to demonstrate overlooked logics that united scripture and cosmos for late ancient thinkers. Irenaeus's fourfold schema of history and Gospel is echoed by Victor.-Poetov., *Tractatus de fabrica mundi* 3 (CSEL 49:4, ed. Hausleiter); Fortunat., *Comm. ev.*, *praef.*, lines 30–54.

25. See Iren., *Haer.* 3.1.1 for another description of the Gospels as four pillars. Irenaeus connects the heavenly throne-room of Ezekiel's and John's visions with the idea of the earth as God's temple (cf. *Haer.* 4.20.11).

Irenaeus mapped this fourfold Gospel onto a quadripartite world geography, consisting of "four regions" (κλίματα) and "four universal winds" (πνεύματα).[26] The fourfold Gospel corresponded multiply to the physical world that humans experience.

We find a similar geographical idiom—and a similar attempt to integrate text and world—in other sources. In a scholion on Hesiod's *Theogony* that probably derives from Alexandrian scholars of the Hellenistic period or the early Principate, a scholiast wrote of a world structured by "four winds" corresponding to the "four regions of the world":

> "Ἀστραίῳ δ' Ἠὼς ἀνέμους τέκεν": ἔτι γὰρ ὄντων τῶν ἀστέρων ὑπὸ τὴν ἕω, τότε τίκτονται ἐξ ἀνατολῆς οἱ ἄνεμοι. τέσσαρες ἄνεμοι, ἐπεὶ καὶ τέσσαρα κλίματα τοῦ κόσμου· Εὐρώπη, Ἀσία, Λιβύη, Μέση.
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> "Then Eos bore to Astraeus the winds": For since the stars were still under the dawn-horizon, the winds were birthed from the east. There are four winds, since there are also four regions of the world: Europe, Asia, Libya, the Middle.[27]

Similarly, a ritual formulary from late ancient Egypt instructed the petitioner to appeal to "the four regions of the world" (τῶν τεσσάρων κλιμάτων τοῦ κόσμου).[28] In this text, knowledge of the fourfold shape of the cosmos was (imagined to be) powerful. In each of these examples, the four regions (κλίματα) represent the whole cosmos. These examples are not unusual; the idea of four directions and four divisions of the world was widespread. Irenaeus's

26. Some biblical texts reflect a fourfold cosmology, with four winds and four corners metonymically representing the whole world (e.g., Isa 11:12; Jer 49:36; Ezek 7:2; Dan 7:2; Matt 24:31; Rev 7:1). This usage continues in other early Christian texts (e.g., *Did.* 10.5; *Ep. apost.* 37.2; Ps.-Cypr., *Mont.* 4.2). Chromatius of Aquileia connects the quadriform structure of the Gospel and cosmos with the four angels and four corners of Rev 7:1 (*Matt.*, *praef.* 10).
27. *Schol. vet. in Hes. Th.* 378 (Lamberto di Gregorio, ed., *Scholia vetera in Hesiodi Theogoniam* [Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1975], 67); cf. Anat. Laod., *Decad.* (J. L. Heiberg, ed., *Anatolius : Sur les dix premiers nombres* [Macon: Protat, 1901], 8) for four winds, four directions, and four regions.
28. PGM VII (P.Lond. 121), lines 478–84 (Karl Preisendanz, ed., *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*, 3 vols. [Berlin: Teubner, 1928–41], 2:22; trans. modified from Dale Martin in Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992], 131).

quadriform cosmos is not a novel invention; rather, he locates the fourfold Gospel in a familiar fourfold universe that had been theorized and debated for centuries.[29] Since, as Irenaeus asserted, "the world in which we exist" is quadriform, he found it natural—even "obvious" (εἰκότως)—that the Gospel also would be quadriform. The fourfold Gospel was imagined as corollary to the structure of the cosmos itself.

Irenaeus offers the earliest evidence for four winds and four regions as figures of a fourfold Gospel. But these idioms continued to be productive in the Christian bibliographic imagination throughout the Roman *oecumene* for centuries.[30] Ephrem of Nisibis, in fourth-century Mesopotamia, alludes to the Gospels, writing that "Four fountains flow down / truth for the four corners" of the world (ܐܪ̈ܒܥܐ ܡܒܘ̈ܥܝܢ ܐܪܕܘ ܫܪ̈ܪܐ ܠܐܪܒܥ ܦܢ̈ܝܬܐ).[31] Augustine of Hippo, in fifth-century North Africa, developed this line of thought even further. He suggested that "perhaps [there are] four [*sc.* evangelists, metonymically representing the four Gospels] for this reason: because there are four parts of the terrestrial world (*partes orbis terrae*)." According to Augustine, the structure of the fourfold Gospel canon precedes and determines the structure of the cosmos: the quadriformity of the cosmos is a "sort of sign" (*quodammodo sacramento*) pointing to the fourfold Gospel. For Augustine, the fourfold text is the *reason*, the final cause, for the fourfold cosmos.[32]

29. On the "conventional division" of the Roman *oecumene* into four regions, see Riggsby, *Mosaics*, 189–90. On the winds, see further Gel. 2.22.3. It would be superfluous to catalogue all the natural entities that were understood as fourfold in the Roman Mediterranean.
30. Other authors who compared the fourfold Gospel with the four winds, four regions, or four cardinal directions include Fortunat., *Comm. ev., praef.* line 109 (winds); *Comm. ev.*, lines 1373–76 (regions); Chromat., *Matt.*, *praef.* 10 (corners); Epiph., *Mens.* 35 (64d–65a, Syriac ed. Dean) (regions); Hier., *Ezech.* 1.1.10 *ad* Ezek 1:5 (regions); Cyr., *Ador.* (PG 68:400.19) (winds); Germ. CP, *H.e.* 32 (winds).
31. Ephr., *Serm. fid.* 2.39–40 (CSCO 212 [Scriptores Syri 88]:8, ed. Beck). Cf. Crawford, "Fourfold," esp. 15.
32. Aug., *Cons.* 1.2.3 (CSEL 43:3, ed. Weihrich): *Isti igitur quattuor evangelistae universo terrarum orbe notissimi, et ob hoc fortasse quattuor, quoniam quattuor sunt partes orbis terrae, per cuius universitatem Christi ecclesiam dilatari ipso sui numeri sacramento quodammodo declararunt, hoc ordine scripsisse perhibentur: primus Matthaeus, deinde Marcus, tertio Lucas, ultimo Ioannes.* "Therefore, those four evangelists are renowned throughout the whole world, and perhaps [there are] four for this reason: because there are four parts of the world, through which the universal church of Christ is extended, they declared by their number as a sort of sign. They are said to have written in this order: first Matthew, then Mark, third Luke, finally John." Augustine is not

The metaphorical alignment between quadriform cosmos and fourfold Gospel is not limited to the images we find in Irenaeus. Early Christians, from Mesopotamia to Ireland, imagined a fourfold Gospel in the idiom, both biblical and geographic, of the four Edenic rivers: Gihon, Euphrates, Pishon, and Tigris (Gen 2:10–14). Thus, for example, the fourth-century Syriac theologian Ephrem writes:

ܒܣܡܠܐ ܕܓܝܚܘܢ ܣܦܪ ܐܘܢܓܠܝܘܢ ܠܡܫܩܝ ܫܬܝܬܐ
ܘܒܦܪܬ ܡܬܟܬܒ ܫܘܬܦܘܬܗ ܕܥܠ ܕܡܬܪܒܝ ܬܥܝܣܗ
ܘܒܦܝܫܘܢ ܡܬܨܝܪ ܛܘܦܣܗ ܘܫܬܩ ܡܢ ܡܫܬܟ ܥܠ ܝܬܗ
ܐܢܬ ܕܟܝܬ ܠܢ ܐܝܟ ܕܓܠܕܩ ܒܡܠܬܟ

> In the symbol of the Gihon, the Gospel has rushed to give [us] drink. / His propagation is inscribed in the Euphrates, for it has increased its teaching. / In the Pishon is depicted his type, and the cessation of disputing about him. / You have cleansed us like the Tigris with [your] word.[33]

Fortunatianus, a fourth-century bishop of Aquileia in northern Italy, makes the point more explicitly. He states that:[34]

alone in this argument. Discussing the four corners of the earth and the four seasons, Chromatius similarly argues that Gospel number orders the cosmos (*Matt., praef.* 10). Below, we will observe a similar argument made by Origen and Maximus.

33. Ephr., *Hymn. fid.* 48.10 (CSCO 154 [Scriptores Syri 73]:154, ed. Beck; trans. Wickes, FC 130:258). Matthew Crawford ("Fourfold," 13–15) suggests that this passage need not refer to a fourfold Gospel; in light of the Ephrem passage cited above (*Serm. fid.* 2.39–40), however, the fourfold Gospel is the best explanation. A passage from the *Commentary on the Gospel* attributed to Ephrem mentions Jesus's cloak, divided into four parts, as symbolizing the Gospel (*Comm. Gos.* 20.27); the commentary explains the correspondence as reflecting the Gospel going into the four parts of the world and does not explicitly connect this fourfold symbolism to the existence of four Gospels.

34. On Fortunatianus as a reader of the Gospels: Lukas J. Dorfbauer, ed., *Fortunatianus Redivivus: Bischof Fortunatian von Aquileia und sein Evangelienkommentar* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), especially Agnès Bastit, "Le prologue aux *Commentarii* sur les évangiles de Fortunatien: Étude analytique et enquête sur les sources" (pp. 1–46).

> *Quattuor ergo futura evangelia olim in figuris ostensum est. Denique in Genesi scriptura declarat: Fons autem procedit ex Edem inrigare paradisum et inde dividitur in quattuor initia. Fons ergo iste est dominus noster Iesus Christus, de quo exeunt quattuor flumina, id est quattuor evangelia.*
>
> It was therefore shown long ago in figures (*in figuris*) that there would be four Gospels. For example, Scripture states in Genesis: A spring comes out of Eden to water paradise, and from there it is divided into four sources. That spring, then, is our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom come four rivers, meaning the four Gospels.[35]

This reading of rivers as Gospels was widespread in both literary texts and visual art.[36] The four rivers are not merely a biblical idiom; while they appear in Genesis, they are also a geographic idiom. As with the four winds and the four regions, the four rivers represent the quadripartite structure of the world to which the fourfold Gospel corresponds.[37] This quadriform logic embeds the fourfold Gospel as a coherent part of the cosmic order.

35. Fortunat., *Comm. ev., praef.*, lines 54–57 (CSEL 103, ed. Dorfbauer; trans. H. A. G. Houghton, *Fortunatianus of Aquileia: Commentary on the Gospels* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017], 2–3). Fortunatianus continues his comparison of the Gospels with the rivers in *praef.* 54–90; he offers etymological discussion of the names of the rivers, connecting each to a particular Gospel. This etymological practice reflects the assumption that language has the power to reveal the structure of the cosmos (cf. C. M. Chin, "Cosmos," in *Late Ancient Knowing: Explorations in Intellectual History*, ed. C. M. Chin and M. Vidas [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015], 99–116 at 107).

36. Cf. Paul A. Underwood, "The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospels," *DOP* 5 (1950): 41–138.

37. As a figure for the fourfold Gospel (or at least in parallel to it), the four rivers appear in Hipp., *Dan.* 1.18.10 (GCS 7:44); Cypr., *Ep.* 73.10.3; Victor.-Poetov., *Apoc.* 4.4 (CSEL 49:54); *Tractatus de fabrica mundi* 3 (CSEL 49:4, ed. Hausleiter); Chromat., *Matt., praef.* 4; Epiph., *Hom. in fest. palm.* (PG 43:432.8); *Mens.* 35 (64d–65a, Syriac ed. Dean); Hier., *Matt., praef.* 2–3; Sedul., *Carm.* 3.170–75; Ps.-Chrys., *Hom. in Jo.* (PG 59:611.33–34); a Gospel preface attributed to Isidore (Donatien de Bruyne, *Prefaces to the Latin Bible,* eds. Thomas O'Loughlin and Pierre-Maurice Bogaert [Turnhout: Brepols, 2015], 177–78 [no. 13]); an anonymous prologue to Mark (de Bruyne, *Prefaces to the Latin Bible*, 182 [no. 17.2]); Leont., *Hom. Pent.* 11.58–70.

"THE FOUNTAIN OF NATURE"

Early Christian thinkers employed a variety of other fourfold figures drawn from botany, mathematics, physics, and astronomy to theorize a fourfold Gospel. These examples reveal Christians conceptualizing the fourfold Gospel through ancient scientific and philosophical discourses about the nature and structure of a quadriform cosmos: Thinking about the fourfold Gospel participates in a broader philosophical engagement with the structure of the cosmos.

The cosmic quadriformity of the Gospel appeared in mundane objects. Fortunatianus offered another image: "the walnut" (*nux*), he asserted,

> *nux figuraliter ostensa quattuor evangelia, sicut superius exposuimus, declarantur* 〈. . .〉 *sic ostendit quattuor evangelia unum deum dei filium locuta ac sibi cohaerere; et sicut unus sapor est quadripertitae nucis, sic quattuor evangelia unam virtutem dei et domini nostri loquuntur, licet varia dixerint.*
>
> proclaims the four Gospels [. . .] figuratively [. . .] it shows that the four Gospels have spoken of one God, the Son of God, and are consistent with each other; and just as there is one flavour in the four sections of the walnut, so the four Gospels speak of a single power of our Lord and God, even if they have said differing things.[38]

The fourfold structure of cosmos and Gospel that is expressed in the four winds and the four primal rivers is manifested, *in nuce*, by the humble walnut, a microcosm of the quadriform whole.[39]

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38. Fortunat., *Comm. ev.*, *praef.*, lines 123–30 (CSEL 103:114–15, ed. Dorfbauer; trans. Houghton, *Fortunatianus*, 5). Cf. lines 101–5.

39. The four parts of a walnut require explanation. The most convenient way to split a walnut is lengthwise on the seam of the shell, which yields two distinct parts. Fortunatianus's argument works if one cuts the walnut on the cross-section.

Fortunatianus's walnut invites us to consider a capacious range of natural phenomena as metaphors for the fourfold Gospel. Quadriform patterns permeate the cosmos. Writing in the early fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea sought "to provide a summary of the writings of the new covenant" (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰς [. . .] τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης γραφάς).[40] He begins with "the holy τετρακτύς of the Gospels." This revealing turn of phrase resonates across several interlocking ancient scientific and philosophical discourses.[41] In appealing to the τετρακτύς, Gospel bibliography intersects with other disciplines that imagined the world in fourfold ways.

According to a famous couplet from the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*, the τετρακτύς was the "fountain of nature" (παγὰν [. . .] φύσεως).[42] The τετρακτύς was a technical term to describe units of four: the first four positive integers, the four elements, the four virtues, and so forth.[43] In the late first or early second century C.E., Theon of Smyrna wrote a treatise

40. Eus., *H.e.* 3.25.1 (SC 31bis:133, ed. Bardy; trans. Jeremy M. Schott, *The History of the Church: A New Translation* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019], 148).
41. The term is also applied to the fourfold Gospel by Thdt., *Ep.* 130; *Ep.* 145. One common translation (McGiffert in *NPNF* 1:155) renders Eusebius's language with the codicological term "quaternion," but τετρακτύς does not appear in such a codicological sense in antiquity. Schott's "quaternity" is more accurate. Gregory Robbins ("*Peri tōn Endiathēkōn Graphōn*: Eusebius and the Formation of the Christian Bible" [PhD diss., Duke University, 1986], 113) translates the word as "quartet." Translating Eusebius's use of the word in *L.C.* 6.5, Harold Drake uses both "quaternity" and "quaternion" (*In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Orations* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976], 91). Bardy translates "tétrade," which can have both musical connotations ("a fourth") and bibliographic ones ("a tetralogy") (SC 31bis:134).
42. Ps.-Pythag., *CA* 47–48 (*apud* Hierocl., *In CA* 20; F. G. Köhler, ed., *Hieroclis in aureum Pythagoreorum carmen commentarius* [Stuttgart: Teubner, 1974], 84): ναὶ μὰ τὸν ἀμετέρᾳ ψυχᾷ παραδόντα τετρακτύν / παγὰν ἀενάου φύσεως. "I swear by the one who has transmitted into our imbalanced souls the quaternity / the source of eternal nature." The τετρακτύς is what brings measure, even συμφωνία, to the soul. Writing in the fifth century C.E., Hierocles interprets this couplet: "The tetrad holds together altogether everything that exists: the number of elements, the seasons of the year [. . .] the tetrad is the cause of everything" (καὶ ἁπλῶς τὰ ὄντα πάντα ἡ τετρὰς ἀνεδήσατο· στοιχείων ἀριθμόν, ὡρῶν τοῦ ἔτους [. . .] τῶν ὅλων αἰτία ἡ τετράς, *In CA* 20.19 (Köhler, ed., *Commentarius*, 89). With slight variations, the same couplet (B 15 Diels) is cited by Sextus Empiricus (*M.* 4.2; 7.94) in the second century C.E and by Porphyry (*VP* 20) in the fourth.
43. Ancient discussions of the τετρακτύς include Plu. (ca. 46–119 C.E.), *Mor.* 2.381–82; Theo. Sm. (fl. ca. 100 C.E.), *Math.* 38; Nicom. (fl. ca. 100 C.E.), *Exc.* 7, 10; S.E., *M.* 4.2–9; Anat. Laod. (fl. ca. 270), *Decad.* (ed. Heiberg, 7–8). Cf. Armand Delatte, "La tétractys pythagoricienne," in *Étude sur la littérature pythagoricienne* (Paris: Champion, 1915), 249–68; Johan Thom, *The Pythagorean Golden Verses: With Introduction and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 171–77; Kalvesmaki, *The Theology of Arithmetic*, 305–309. The word τετρακτύς had robust resonances as a technical term in philosophical and scientific contexts; these varied uses related to one another in a shared numeric logic. Eusebius could have chosen a different conceptual framework

surveying various fourfold phenomena—numerical, geometrical, elemental, social, seasonal, biological—that correspond to the τετρακτύς.[44] The second-century C.E. scholar Sextus Empiricus identified the τετρακτύς as foundational for Pythagorean harmonics, number theory, and geometry.[45] Because the ratios between the first four integers formed the basis of ancient harmonic theory, the τετρακτύς resonates with the broader use of musical metaphor—συμφωνία, διαφωνία, ἁρμωνία—to describe literary relationships, including ones between Gospel texts.[46] The term τετρακτύς also appears in ethics, describing the four cardinal virtues, and in meteorology, describing the four seasons. In both of these cases, again, early Christian thinkers discerned correspondences with the fourfold Gospel.[47] Eusebius's description of a fourfold Gospel belongs in this world of metaphor, evoking these varied idioms. We do not

for his discussion of Gospel fourfoldness (e.g., the language of the τετράς), but instead employed this specialist vocabulary, inviting his audience to understand the fourfold Gospel within these numeric and cosmic frameworks.

44. Theo. Sm., *Math.* 38.

45. S.E., *M.* 4.2–9 (cf. notes in Richard A. H. Bett, *Sextus Empiricus: Against Those in the Disciplines* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018], 184–87). While Sextus critiques Pythagorean number theory, he attests the ongoing significance of these ideas in the first centuries of the era. The Platonists Theon and Anatolius offer a more positive reception of Pythagorean mathematics. Especially through their reception in Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, Pythagorean concepts exercised enormous influence throughout antiquity. This is not to say that everyone around the ancient Mediterranean (Christian or otherwise) imagined a fourfold cosmos, but rather to point out the widespread philosophical and scientific concepts that understood the world in fourfold ways. The (Neo-)Platonism of most of the Christian figures discussed here undoubtedly contributed to the vitality of Gospel metaphors that assumed a fourfold cosmos.

46. S.E., *M.* 4.6–9 describes the relationship between τετρακτύς, harmonics, and cosmos; cf. Nicom., *Exc.* 7, 10; Anat. Laod., *Decad.*; and the discussion of Ptolemy's *Harmonics* in Jacqueline Feke, *Ptolemy's Philosophy: Mathematics as a Way of Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 114–43. On musical metaphors for the Gospels, and for literary criticism more broadly, see Claudio Zamagni, "Existe-t-il une terminologie technique dans les *Questions* d'Eusèbe de Césarée?," in *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context*, ed. Claudio Zamagni and Annelie Volgers (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 81–98 at 87; Morlet, *Symphonia*, 226.

47. Jerome (*Ezech.* 1.1.12 *ad* Ezek 1:6–8) and Maximus (*Ambig.* 21.5–6) both connect the four virtues and four Gospels. For τετρακτύς as a reference to the four virtues, see Evagr. Pont., *Or., praef.*; Synes., *Ep.* 140. Ambr., *Parad.* 3, connects the four rivers of Gen 2:10–14 with the four cardinal virtues and the four ages of the world; despite interconnected biblical and cosmic metaphors, Ambrose does not directly connect the rivers or virtues with the fourfold Gospel. As Merkel notes, in Ambrose "finden wir den interessanten Versuch, die Pluralität der Evangelien im Rahmen der antiken Wissenschaft zu begründen. Die Evangelien enthalten alle Weisheit der Welt, Naturphilosophie, Ethik und Logik, jedes hat einen bestimmten Schwerpunkt," although the passage under discussion (*Luc.* 1.1–4) does not directly invoke fourfoldness (Merkel, *Pluralität*, XXIII). For the four seasons and the four Gospels, see Victor.-Poetov., *Tractatus de fabrica mundi* 3 (CSEL 49:4, ed. Hausleiter); Chromat., *Matt., praef.* 10; Epiph., *Mens.* 35 (64d–65a, Syriac ed. Dean); Hier., *Ezech.* 1.1.11 *ad* Ezek 1:6–8; Ambrosiast. (Ps.-Aug.), *Qu. test.*, app. III. Eus., *L.C.* 6.8, also discusses the seasons, but does not directly connect them to the fourfold Gospel.

need to pick just one resonance here; as Sextus tells us, "Indeed everything corresponds to number."[48] Mathematics, music, physics, and ethics are interlocking parts of the same fourfold cosmic order.[49] The numerical correspondence between sacred text and physical cosmos affords a mode of knowing both. Bibliography and cosmology merge.

Eusebius provides another striking example of this correspondence between text and cosmos. To map similarity and difference in the fourfold Gospel, Eusebius constructed an elaborate set of tables (canons, κανόνες).[50] To describe this project, Eusebius employed the language of musical relationships (συμφωνία, ὁμοφώνος).[51] To depict the complex relationships between the four Gospels, Eusebius adapted the column-and-row table which had previously been used primarily as a specialized technology of ancient astronomy.[52] Eusebius's ten canons echoed astronomical tables like those of the second-century astronomer Ptolemy.[53]

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48. ἀριθμῷ δέ τε πάντ᾽ ἐπέοικεν (S.E., *M.* 4.2 [Jürgen Mau and Hermann Mutschmann, eds., *Sexti Empirici Opera, Vol. 3, Adversus mathematicos libros I–VI continens* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1961), 133]; cf. *M.* 7.94, 109). Sextus is quoting a Pythagorean saying, with some mockery.

49. We cannot ignore the deep connections between ancient philosophy, philology, and cosmology. Discussing Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*, Daryn Lehoux describes the interwoven nature of ancient Roman knowing: "astronomy bleeds into ethics, ethics into politics, politics into theology, theology into mathematics, mathematics into harmonics, harmonics into astronomy again" (*What Did the Romans Know? An Inquiry into Science and Worldmaking* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012], 9). Similarly, both the Christian Origen and the Neoplatonist Iamblichus created curricula that integrated philosophy, mathematics, geometry, music, astronomy, physics, and ethics: Or., *Ep.* 2; Gr. Thaum., *Pan. or.*; cf. David Satran, *In the Image of Origen: Eros, Virtue, and Constraint in the Early Christian Academy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018).

50. Cf. Carl Nordenfalk, *Die spätantiken Kanontafeln: Kunstgeschichtliche Studien über die eusebianische Evangelien-Konkordanz in den vier ersten Jahrhunderten ihrer Geschichte*, 2 vols. (Goteborg: Isacson, 1938); Jeremiah Coogan, "Mapping the Fourfold Gospel: Textual Geography in the Eusebian Apparatus," *JECS* 25 (2017): 337–57; Matthew R. Crawford, *The Eusebian Canon Tables: Ordering Textual Knowledge in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Coogan, *Eusebius the Evangelist*.

51. Eusebius describes his project in the brief *Ep. Carp.* Text: Eberhard Nestle et al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 89*–90*. συμφωνία: *superscriptio*; ὁμοφώνος: line 5.

52. Eusebius—like the earlier mathematicians—emphasized the additive logic of the τετρακτύς: 1+2+3+4=10 (Eus., *L.C.* 6.5; cf. S.E., *M.* 4.2–3; Anat. Laod., *Decad.*). It is striking that Eusebius constructed precisely *ten* canons for his system of Gospel cross-references. Nordenfalk (*Kanontafeln*, 29) proposed, based on *L.C.* 6.5, that Eusebius arranged the Gospels into ten canons based on a Pythagorean appreciation for ten's perfection (cf. πλήρης καὶ παντέλειος [. . .] πάσας ἰδέας καὶ πάντα μέτρα πάντων ἀριθμῶν λόγων τε καὶ συμφωνιῶν καὶ ἁρμονιῶν περιέχουσα, *L.C.* 6.14 [GCS 7, ed Heikel]). On this reading, the ten-table arrangement reflects Eusebius's theory of the unity of the fourfold Gospel, based in the natural order, although Eusebius never explicitly connects ten to four or to the τετρακτύς. Other figures used the term τετρακτύς to describe different relationships between four numbers (e.g., 6:8:9:10) (Nicom., *Exc.* 7, 10; Plu., *Mor.* 2.381–82).

53. Similarities between the Eusebian canons and the astronomical tables of Ptolemy were first observed by Carl Nordenfalk, "Canon Tables on Papyrus," *DOP* 36 (1982): 29–38. In the fourth century, the column-and-row table

Just as Ptolemy's tables ordered the movement of heavenly bodies, showing their symphonic movement, so also Eusebius's Gospel canons revealed the symphonic relationships between the four Gospels.[54] Eusebius mapped the structure of the fourfold Gospel like one might map the structure of the heavens.

Eusebius also uses the term τετρακτύς to refer to "the quaternity of elements" (τὴν τῶν στοιχείων τετρακτύν), the "earth, water, air, fire" (γῆν, ὕδωρ, ἀέρα, πῦρ) involved in divine creation of the cosmos.[55] Eusebius's account of the formation of the universe, including his presentation of the four elements, parallels the framing of the cosmos in Plato's *Timaeus* (31b–33d).[56] As we have seen, Origen had asserted roughly a hundred years earlier that "the four Gospels" are "the elements (στοιχεία) of the church's faith, from which [. . .] the whole world (κόσμος)" is put together.[57] The term στοιχεία, meaning both "letters" and "elements," connects book and world.[58] The Gospels correspond to, even merge with, the four

remained rare outside of the specialized context of astronomy; Eusebius's canons thus evoke the disciplinary modes of knowledge associated with this emergent technology (Crawford, *Eusebian Canon Tables*, 43–53; Coogan, *Eusebius the Evangelist*, ch. 2).

54. For a survey of ancient references to the symphonic movement of the heavens, see Morlet, *Symphonia*, 22–25. The idea that the world is harmonic intersects with the idea that the world is quadriform, as harmonic relationships themselves were understood as quadriform (cf. S.E., *M.* 4.2–9).

55. Eus., *L.C.* 6.5; cf. 6.11–17 (GCS 7, ed. Heikel).

56. The *Timaeus* had an enormous reception among Christians and others in antiquity; cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?* Timaeus *and Genesis in Counterpoint* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Gretchen Reydams-Schils, *Calcidius on Plato's* Timaeus*: Greek Philosophy, Latin Reception, and Christian Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). Eusebius's preceding discussion (*Laud. Const.* 6.4) focuses on the relationship between unity and multiplicity.

57. Or., *Jo.* 1.4.21; cf. 10.8.38; 10.38.262; frag. 79. Compare Origen's thinking about numerical correspondence between books and letters, discussing the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the twenty-two books of the Hebrew scriptures (originally in Origen's preface to the Psalms, cited in Eus., *H.e.* 6.25.1–2). As yet another fourfold correspondence—one perhaps not lost on early Christian thinkers theorizing a quadriform Gospel corpus—in the symbolic system afforded by Greek tachygraphy, written language itself exhibited a tetradic structure in which every written sign (σημεῖον) appeared in four coordinate forms; cf. Herbert J. M. Milne, *Greek Shorthand Manuals: Syllabary and Commentary, Edited from Papyri and Waxed Tablets in the British Museum and from the Antinoë Papyri in the Possession of the Egypt Exploration Society* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1934); Sofía Torallas Tovar and Klaas A. Worp, *To the Origins of Greek Stenography (P. Monts.Roca I)* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2006).

58. As observed by Stephanie Frampton (*Empire*, 61n21), this usage of στοιχεία to describe elements goes back to Plato (e.g., *Tht.* 201e). Cf. Lucretius's use of Latin *elementa*, discussed above.

Empedoclean elements out of which the cosmos is constructed.[59] Unfortunately, Origen does not enable us to define this relationship more precisely. Writing in the seventh century, however, Maximus Confessor developed this fourfold logic further, arguing that the fourfold Gospel corresponds to the elements that constitute the physical cosmos and to the virtues that constitute the spiritual realm (*Ambig.* 21.5).[60] There are four elements and four virtues (τοσαῦτα γὰρ κατὰ στοιχεῖα τυγχάνει τοῦ κόσμου τούτου καὶ τέσσαρες πάλιν ἀρεταί) "in order that both the intelligible cosmos inside us and the cosmos in which we exist" (ἵνα τὸν τέως ἐν ἡμῖν νοητὸν κόσμον, καὶ τὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐσμεν) might be brought together by the true λόγος of the fourfold Gospel. Like Origen and Augustine (who had made a similar argument about fourfold geography), Maximus makes the underlying logic explicit. The relationship between the fourfold Gospel and quadriform cosmos is more than mere metaphor: The Gospels are the *reason* for the corresponding fourfold structures of the physical and spiritual cosmos.

CONCLUSION

In late antiquity, organizing a world was like organizing a library, and vice versa. In this article, I have excavated one neglected theme in the early Christian engagement with Gospel

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59. Others who compared the four Gospels and the four elements include Victor.-Poetov., *Tractatus de fabrica mundi* 3 (CSEL 49:4, ed. Hausleiter); Hier., *Ezech.* 1.1.11 *ad* Ezek 1:6–8; Max., *Ambig.* 21.5–6. An elaborate reception appears in the work of the twelfth-century Nicetas of Seides, who identified each Gospel with a particular element (*Conspectus librorum sacrorum* 270). For a different connection between creation and the fourfold Gospel, see Ephr., *Hymn. virg.* 51.2 (CSCO 223 [Scriptores Syri 94]:162, ed. Beck), which links the four Gospel books to the fourth day of creation (cf. Crawford, "Fourfold," 15–16).

60. Διὸ καὶ τέσσαρα τὸν ἀριθμὸν ὑπάρχει τὰ Εὐαγγέλια, ὡς τοῖς ὑπὸ αἴσθησιν ἔτι καὶ φθορὰν οὖσι τέως χωρητά. Τοσαῦτα γὰρ καὶ τὰ στοιχεῖα τυγχάνει τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, καὶ τέσσαρες πάλιν ἀρεταί, ἐξ ὧν ὁ κατὰ διάνοιαν πνευματικὸς συνέστηκε κόσμος, ἵνα τὸν τέως ἐν ἡμῖν νοητὸν κόσμον, καὶ τὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐσμεν, περιγράφῃ τῆς ἀληθείας ὁ λόγος, καὶ ἀλλήλοις αὐτοὺς ἀσυγχύτως καθ' ἕνωσιν συμβάλλῃ, καὶ ἀλλήλων πάλιν ἀδιαιρέτως διακρίνῃ ταῖς τῶν συνιστώντων αὐτοὺς στοιχείων ὁμοιότησιν (Nicholas Constas, ed., *Maximus Confessor: On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014]). Maximus goes on to connect each Gospel with a particular sensible element and a particular noetic virtue (*Ambig.* 21.6). Maximus knew Origen's corpus well and may be developing the thought latent in Origen's text.

pluriformity: the metaphorical alignment of a fourfold Gospel with the physical cosmos. This habit of bibliographic imagination made sense in late antiquity. Textual knowledge was a properly *natural* exercise; text and cosmos reflected the same divinely ordained "underlying order."[61] In such a "languaged cosmos," is it any surprise that the bibliographic imagination was cosmological?[62] The homology between legible world and cosmic text invited just such a mode of cosmic bibliography.[63] A fourfold cosmos afforded a fitting way to conceptualize a fourfold text.

The early Christian technique of using number to align the emergent fourfold Gospel with the structure of the physical cosmos was widespread. We find examples throughout the Mediterranean world in Latin, Greek, and Syriac from the second century onward. A few images, like the four winds or four elements, enjoyed widespread popularity and enduring reception. Others, like Fortunatianus's walnut, continued to emerge, showing the ongoing vitality of this quadriform imagination. Although these interlocking fourfold metaphors have been neglected in scholarship, I argue that they express an early Christian bibliographic discourse that used the category of number to integrate text and world.

Yet this quadriform cosmos was not a Christian invention. Rather, early Christian thinkers located the Gospels in an existing fourfold universe—manifested in geography, music, elements, virtues, and many other phenomena. Early Christian bibliographic metaphors resonated with broader conceptions of the physical world in the Roman Mediterranean. The varied natural metaphors that early Christians used to make sense of Gospel fourfoldness

61. I adopt the phrase from Stefaniw, "Knowledge," 287.
62. Schott, "Language," 58.
63. This alignment between text and cosmos facilitates what Chin has described as a "sympathetic cosmos" ("Cosmos," 107). For a related argument that ancient scientific commentary in disciplines like medicine and mathematics had a "tendency to blur the distinction of nature and text," see Markus Asper, "Explanation Between Nature and Text: Ancient Commentaries on Science," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 44 (2013): 43–50 at 43.

reflect a capacious engagement with the structure of the cosmos and with philosophical and scientific ways of knowing that cosmos.

Most strikingly, a number of early Christians—including Origen, Augustine, and Maximus—thought that the fourfold Gospel was the *reason* for cosmic quadriformity. Other early Christian figures may have described the logic of the underlying numerical correspondence in different terms; in charting this late ancient bibliographical cosmology, I do not wish to force these varied thinkers into perfect agreement. Yet for none of the authors here surveyed was the fourfold Gospel secondary. In this bibliographic imaginary, Gospel number orders disparate parts of the cosmos and integrates the disciplines that study them. The Gospels fund a specifically Christian twist on epistemology and cosmology, which imagines the fourfold Gospel as structuring the cosmos itself.

We return, finally, to Irenaeus's question: "How indeed could the number of the Gospels be more or less?" How indeed? The early Christian bibliographic imagination wove a fourfold Gospel into the fabric of a quadriform cosmos. The symbolic value of number exceeded enumeration, providing a way of articulating the coherence of the fourfold Gospel—with itself and with the rest of the world. From microcosm to macrocosm, this imagined universe exhibits a tetramorphic structure. For these early Christian thinkers, the walnut, the four regions, and the harmonic tetrachord are not simply metaphors. They are analogies in the strong sense, correspondences between Gospel and cosmos. The bibliographic and the cosmic merge: The fourfold Gospel structures the universe itself.

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