The empty tomb (Lk 24:1-12) in historical perspective

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ABSTRACT
This paper deals with historical problems regarding Luke's version of the empty tomb story. The question of Luke's sources for the story is first investigated, then his redaction of it, and finally its historicity.

1 INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this paper is to look at some historical problems regarding the story of the empty tomb as it is presented in Luke's Gospel. Historical problems in this case do not only refer to the historicity of the story, but also to the formation of the story in its Lucan form. Hence this paper will first deal with the source(s) used by Luke for his story, then with the extent and purpose of Luke's redaction and lastly the historicity of the story.

2 THE SOURCE(S) USED BY LUKE
In order to proceed with a discussion of Luke's source or sources it is helpful to first look at the differences between Luke and the other Gospels.

2.1 Differences between Luke and the other Gospels
Apart from the fact that Luke's story is smoother and better told than Mark's (Perrin 1977:60), Luke has the following differences in comparison with Mark:

1. In Mark three women visit the tomb, in Luke more than three, and their names appear in different places in the story.
2. In Luke the women are not concerned (as in Mark) about the opening of the tomb.
3. In Luke the women enter the tomb on their own initiative and discover for themselves that the tomb is empty; in Mark the young man invites them to inspect the empty tomb.
5. The message to the women differs, and in Luke no longer concerns seeing Jesus in Galilee, but refers to an earlier passion prediction.
6. In contrast with Mark, where the women kept silent, in Luke they "told all this to the eleven and to all the rest".
7. Luke does not mention the women's fear on leaving the tomb, as Mark does.
9. Luke adds Peter’s visit to the tomb.

A comparison between Luke and Matthew shows that there are even greater differences - that is, speaking of subject matter only, because Neiryck (1974:193-5) has pointed out many minor agreements between Matthew and Luke, contrary to Mark.

Lastly, it must be mentioned that, apart from all the differences between Luke and John’s stories, there are also some points on which Luke and John agree, contrary to the other two Gospels. These are especially the two angels or men at the tomb, against the one of the other Gospels, and Peter’s visit to the tomb (cf Lk 24:12 and Jn 20:3-10).

2.2 The development of the text

Having established how Luke’s story differs from those of the other Gospels, we should now try to establish the formation of the story in Luke. The question is whether Luke’s version can sufficiently be explained by the two-source theory or whether one should consider some other source(s) for this story and possibly for the whole of Luke’s passion narrative.

The latter is the view of Taylor (1972), although the general trend is strongly in favour of the two-source theory. Taylor (1972:119) claims that “the Lucan narratives of the passion and resurrection were probably derived from an earlier non-Marcan source or sources”. He does, however, admit to some minor exceptions (Lk 22:1-13, 54b-61; 23:50-54), together with Marcan insertions and additions, and other additions and modifications introduced by Luke himself when he composed the Gospel. The passages that are partially assimilated to Mark can be "adequately explained as influenced by a knowledge of Mark at the time the Third Gospel was compiled".

As far as Luke 24:1-12 is concerned Taylor sees verses 1-3 as reflecting the influence of Mark, and verse 10a as a Marcan insertion. Taylor visualises Luke as actually using a written document as source for his passion and resurrection narratives, but knowing Mark well, sometimes reflecting Mark’s information and sometimes actually inserting Marcan material. Taylor does not seem to have found many followers of his hypothesis, but his view should nevertheless be taken note of.

The numerical and linguistic arguments put forward by Taylor (1972:104) have to be taken seriously. He notes that out of 163 words in Luke 24:1-11 only 37 are common to Luke and Mark. If the three phrases which are textually suspect are omitted, the number drops to 30 (18.7%). Together with the differences in subject matter, Taylor sees this as conclusive enough to opt for a non-Marcan source in Luke 24:1-11, with a Marcan insertion giving the names of the women in verse 10a (1972:108).

Another suggestion concerning Luke’s sources is that of Goulder (1977-78), who claims that Luke not only had Mark’s text as a source for this story, but that Luke’s knowledge of Matthew also played a role. After citing a large
number of minor agreements between Luke and Matthew against Mark in this story (Goulder 1977-78:236ff), he concludes that the most striking points are the agreement between Matthew and Luke against Mark that the sun had not yet come up when the women went to the tomb, and the word order of Matthew and Luke against Mark in "He is not here, but has risen" (Mark: "he has risen, he is not here"). The crucial phrase which gives away Luke's knowledge of Matthew is καὶ σαββατον ἐπέφωσκεν (and the sabbath was beginning) in Luke 23:54. Seeing that the verb ἐπέφωσκεν (to dawn) occurs only in Luke 23:54 and Matthew 28:1, and in the same context, Goulder claims that the use of it can only be ascribed to Luke's reminiscence of Matthew. Although this is an interesting suggestion, we can still not be sure that Luke knew Matthew, and there are indeed other ways of explaining the similarities between them.

With regard to the points of contact between Luke and John's stories mentioned earlier, it is well known that there are parallels between Luke's special material and John. The existence of a tradition common to Luke and John seems to be the prevailing explanation of this fact. Yet, some voices are going up stating that John not only knew the Synoptics, but in fact made use of them. Thus Neirynck (1984:165, 179) is of the opinion that John relied on Luke 24:12 when composing John 20:1-10 (Peter's visit to the tomb), and on Matthew 28:9-10 in John 20:11-18 (the christophany). We will come back to this when we discuss Luke 24:12 in the next section.

In spite of the attempts to find other sources for Luke's story, it is still the traditional hypothesis of Luke using Mark's story which is widely accepted. This does not mean, however, that this is the final answer to the question of sources, as the arguments in favour of other sources indicated above prove. That Luke indeed used Mark in this instance is fairly obvious, as will be indicated in the next section. The question is, however, where Luke got the additional material in his story. Either he could have invented it (Neirynck 1984:175) or he could have got it from some other source, such as L, which could have been oral or written. Whether John used the same source or whether he used Luke is the next question. It should be kept in mind that Luke himself mentions many who have written accounts which were presumably available to him as sources. Together with these sources, he had the oral tradition of eyewitnesses and the apostolic preachers. He also mentions his own research (cf Lk 1:1-4).

At this stage, therefore, without claiming that the question of sources has been discussed in depth, I would opt for the possibility that Luke used Mark as his primary source, but that he also followed an independent tradition (cf Fuller 1972:95).

3 LUKE'S REDACTION OF MARK'S TEXT
We shall now proceed with a discussion of Luke 24:1-12 itself, paying attention to the way Luke used his source(s) and to the purpose of his alterations and additions.
First, it is necessary to say something about Luke’s resurrection narrative. Whereas earlier scholars did not always treat Luke’s resurrection narrative separately from the passion narrative, later scholars (such as Fitzmyer 1985) have drawn attention to this distinction. The passion narrative comprises chapters 22-23, and the resurrection narrative chapter 24. The latter consists of five episodes, namely the women’s visit to the tomb (24:1-12), the appearance to disciples walking to Emmaus (24:13-35), the appearance to the eleven and their companions in Jerusalem (24:36-43), the commissioning of this group to be witnesses and to preach (24:44-49) and the ascension (24:50-53). All these events seem to take place on the same day, namely “the first day of the week”, mentioned in 24:1. The only one of these events which coincides with the other Gospels is the tomb story.

Luke 23:56b seems to belong with 24:1, especially on account of the construction μεν...δέ in the Greek text (cf Fitzmyer 1983:108). It tells of the Galilean women resting on the Sabbath, having prepared spices and ointments on the same day as the burial. In Mark 16:1 they only buy the spices after the sabbath, with the intention of anointing Jesus. This is of course problematic for several reasons, and Luke’s changes may be ascribed to the difficulties he experienced with Mark’s text. With his changing of the time when the spices were bought Luke might have wanted to explain why the burial rites were not completed on the Friday, namely because the sabbath had overtaken the women before they could do so. Luke also omits the women’s intention of anointing Jesus. Jeremias (1980:310) sees the verb ἔσωσαν (rested) as Luke’s redaction.

Luke 24:1. Luke follows Mark 16:2, indicating that the women went to the tomb on the first day of the week, but differs from Mark about the exact time of the visit. Mark says it was just after sunrise, Luke says it was at "deep dawn". This change might be explained by the fact that Mark rather contradicts himself with his "very early ... when the sun had risen". Redactional phrases are ὑπερθευμένου and ἐπὶ τοῦ μνημείου (which is preferable to μνήμη here, cf Jeremias 1980:310).

Luke 24:2. The women find that the stone before the tomb has been rolled away, without first wondering who will roll it away, as in Mark 16:2. Luke 24:2 corresponds with Mark 16:4, but Luke drops Mark’s phrase about the size of the stone, in keeping with the fact that he does not stress the stone as much as Mark does at the burial and in the discussion of the women. Luke changes Mark’s ἐνσωλέφωσεν θεωροῦν to εὗρον, an example of Luke’s characteristic use of εὑρίσκω interchangeably with verba videndi (Jeremias 1980:310). Also the phrase ἐν τοῦ μνημείου is Luke’s redaction.

Luke 24:3. Here Luke deviates from Mark 16:5 in the sense that the women enter the tomb to find no one there. In Mark the women, on entering, find a young man in the tomb. Luke refers to the body "of the Lord Jesus", a phrase which is omitted in manuscript D and several manuscripts of the Old Latin version (a so-called Western non-interpolation). It does,
however, occur in many important manuscripts, and seems to be Lucan (cf Act 1:21; 4:33; 8:16), and should therefore be retained. Κύριος is probably Luke's way of pointing to the fact that Jesus has now risen. Other Lucan phrases are οὐχ εὐροῦν and τὸ σῶμα (Jeremias 1980:310).

Luke 24:4. This verse contains three new features in comparison with Mark 16:5, namely the women are perplexed before the angelic appearance, the one man in Mark becomes two in Luke and the two men appear only when the women are already in the tomb. Neither Mark nor Luke calls the men angels, but in the Lucan summary in verse 23 they are called angels. Most critics regard the doubling of Mark's one man as the effect of popular story-telling or Luke's desire to provide two witnesses as in the transfiguration story (cf Marshall 1973:67). The appearance of a pair instead of one, as well as the arrival at a later stage of the two men who were not there at the beginning, are two of the details which Luke has in common with John. The verse contains several Lucanisms: the characteristic periphrastic use of ἐγένετο, and the construction of the ensuing sentence (cf Jeremias 1980:310); Luke's favourite phrases ἀπορεῖ; καὶ ἰδοὺ; ἀνδρεῖς; ἐπέστησον; and ἐν ἐσθήτει.

Luke 24:5. Amazement on the part of the women in Mark 16:5 becomes fear in Luke. This might be due to the influence of Mark 16:8. Luke adds that the women bowed to the ground, which is a typical feature in accounts of theophanies and visions of angels (cf Act 9:4). The negative imperative of Mark 16:6 "Do not be alarmed" has disappeared in Luke, and Mark's "You seek Jesus" has become the question "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" Luke also refers elsewhere to the risen Jesus as alive (Lk 24:23; Act 1:3; 25:19), and he is the only one who uses this word with reference to the risen Jesus. Life is one of the effects of the Christ event in Lucan theology (Fitzmyer 1983: 226). Γενόμενος plus adjective is typically Lucan, an example of his love of participiums. Also the adjective ἐμφάσος and the phrase εἶπαν πρός with accusative are Lucan expressions (Jeremias 1980:311).

Luke 24:6. Luke (like Matthew) has inverted Mark's order in the words "He is not here, but has been raised". The phrase is another Western non-interpolation, but Fitzmyer (1985:1545) states that it can no longer be regarded as such (cf also 1983:130-131). In Greek the aorist passive indicative ἐγέρθη is used and gives rise to differences of opinion as to its translation, namely either as "has risen" or as "has been raised". Although the same aorist passive is used in Luke 11:8 and 13:25 with an intransitive meaning, that is "has risen", Luke elsewhere ascribes the resurrection of Jesus to God (cf the active of ἐγείρεων in Act 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30,37), rather than to Jesus' personal activity, and it is better to understand the form as a real passive, that is "has been raised" (Fitzmyer 1985: 1545 - cf ἀνελήμφθη, "has been taken up" in Act 1:11,22 and ἀνεφέρετο, "was carried up" in Lk 24:51). It is a use of the theological passive.
Instead of instructions to go and tell the disciples and Peter that the risen Christ will go before them to Galilee, Luke makes the men remind the women of what Jesus had said to them while He was still in Galilee. Luke's mention of Galilee as the scene of the prophecy is usually regarded as his substitute for mentioning Galilee as the place of the appearance of Jesus (Marshall 1973: 68). Luke is obviously deliberately presenting a different picture from Mark, since he describes no appearances of Jesus outside Jerusalem. When the construction ὥς plus a finite verb is used after verbs of remembering, realising, et cetera, it is usually Lucan. Also the pleonastic use of λέγων (v 7) after ἐλάλησεν (v 6) is regarded as redactional (Jeremias 1980:311).

Luke 24:7. This version of Jesus' passion and resurrection prediction differs in wording from the others in Luke's Gospel (9:22,44; 18:32f) and of course it differs from the Marcan source because Mark does not have a prediction of the passion and resurrection in this context. This raises the question of some source other than Mark. In view of some alleged Semitic features (cf the proleptic position of "the Son of man") an underlying Aramaic expression has been proposed by Black (1967:53).

This has been refuted by several scholars (cf Marshall 1973: 68; Fitzmyer 1985:1545). A similar construction as that at the beginning of 24:7 (the proleptic use of the object) occurs also in Luke 9:31 and Acts 13:32f, so that it might be viewed as a Lucanism. Against the argument that Luke did not create "Son of man" sayings, it might be pointed out that this was not a new saying, but rather a summary of existing sayings (cf Marshall 1973:68). The evangelist was probably especially influenced by 9:22 of his own Gospel and perhaps also by Mark 14:41. The verb σταυρωθήσεται (be crucified) in 24:7 does, however, not occur in any of the other predictions in Mark or Luke. Seeing that we believe that Luke actually had Mark's text in front of him, it is possible that his choice of this word was influenced by the reference to the crucifixion in Mark 16:6. Matthew uses the same verb in passion predictions at Matthew 20:19 and 26:2, which could prove that the later evangelists prefer the verb σταυρωθήσεται to ἀποκτενωθήσεται (to be killed).

The reason why Luke has used this résumé of the earlier passion predictions is seen by some as the fact that he used a non-Marcan passion prediction, while others try to find a clue in the use of the word δεῖ (must) (cf Fuller 1972:98f). This word plays an important role in the Lucan theology and occurs more frequently in Luke than in any other New Testament writer's work (cf Grundmann 1964:23-34). It occurs especially in the context of the suffering of Jesus and denotes the plan of God in salvation history as enunciated in the Old Testament scriptures (cf Fitzmyer 1983:179f).

Luke 24:8. Again, Luke does not follow his Marcan source, as he still refers to his previous verse which was not in Mark. Here he tells how the women remembered Jesus' words in Galilee. The expression is also found in Acts 11:16, and could perhaps be a Lucan expression. The use of τῶν

Luke 24:9. Luke's version of Mark 16:8 is completely different from Mark's. The words "from the tomb" is another Western non-interpolation. It is, however, included in the majority of manuscripts. Instead of fear and silence on the part of the women, Luke describes how the women went back from the tomb to tell everything to the eleven and all the others. The eleven appear again in 24:33; Acts 1:26; 2:14. Who the others are is not spelled out, but it is apparently from this group that two will go their way to Emmaus (cf ἐξ αὐτῶν in 24:13). "The others" is a favourite Lucan way of referring to a group larger than those immediately specified and suggests that this verse as a whole is a Lucan composition (Fuller 1972:100). Other redactional words and expressions are ὑποστρέφοντα, πάντα ... πᾶσι and τοῖς ἐνδεκά (the latter being used four out of the five places in the New Testament by Luke).

The silence of the women in Mark is of course problematic - how would Mark for instance have known about their experience if they had said nothing to anyone? It is noteworthy that Matthew agrees with Luke that the women told the disciples about their experience, and that there seems to be a similar tradition behind John 20:17, where the risen Jesus commands Mary Magdalene to go tell his brothers about his ascension. It therefore seems as if there was another tradition in circulation about the women telling the disciples of their experience at the tomb. The question of Luke using some other source here thus arises anew, as from this point onwards we can no longer compare Luke with Mark.

Luke 24:10. This verse corresponds with Mark 16:1 in the sense that it gives the names of the women who went to the tomb, but it is rather problematic. Not only is the position of the verse quite different from Mark's account as far as its context in the story is concerned, but the names of the women also differ from those in Mark. Mark gives the names at the beginning of his narrative, Luke gives them very late in his narrative. Like Mark, Luke also places Mary Magdalene at the top of the list, but with a different word order which is unparalleled elsewhere in the New Testament (ἡ Μαγδαληνή Μαρία instead of Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνή). Was Luke perhaps using a list of names from a different source? The second name in Luke's list, Joanna, is not found in Mark's list, and is only mentioned elsewhere in Luke 8:3. The third name in Luke's list is Mary (the mother) of James. This name is apparently taken from Mark's list, which in turn refers back to Mark 15:40, where Mary is said to be the mother of James and Joses. The next name in Mark's list, Salome, is omitted by Luke. It is possible that Luke has reconstructed Mark's list with his own list of Galilean women in 8:3 in mind, but even then Luke's two lists only have two out of three names in common. Therefore it is not improbable that Luke uses a separate list here.

The textual transmission of this verse varies, with some manuscripts omitting ἤσον δέ at the beginning of the verse, but this seems to be a secondary.
simplification of the text (cf Marshall 1973: 70). The syntax of the verse is difficult to understand and, with the textual alternatives taken into account, may be translated in different ways (cf Marshall 1973:70 for six possible translations). The link between verse 9 and verse 10 is also not clear: verse 10 seems to be an explanation of πᾶσων τοῖς λουποῖς at the end of verse 9, but this would mean that the masculine form in verse 9 is explained by a list of women in verse 10. Small wonder that Fitzmyer (1985:1546) says of this verse: "No one knows for sure how the verse should be taken".

The intention of the verse, however, seems to be that the names given are those of the women who visited the tomb and that they and the others with them told the disciples of the things that had happened. The eleven of the previous verse are now called "the apostles". The use of this term for the disciples prior to their post-resurrection commission is characteristic of Luke (cf Fuller 1972:100). Again there are several Lucan words and expressions, namely και αἱ λουπαί, the preposition σὺν, the expression ἐλεγον πρὸς with accusative and, of course, τοῖς ἀποστόλοις (Jeremias 1980:312).

Luke 24:11. This verse states that the words of the women seemed far-fetched and that the disciples did not believe them. Although the style of the verse is Lucan, the motif of the disciples' unbelief or disbelief is widespread (cf Lk 24:41; Mt 28:17; Mk 16:11,14; Jn 20:25,27). Here it seems to be a Lucan insertion for some reason: perhaps to pave the way for the account in 24:22-24 (Marshall 1973:71) or perhaps to preserve the independence of the witness of the apostles: apostles cannot come to faith as a result of the testimony of third parties (Fuller 1972:100f). Redactional words and phrases are ἥνωσον, ἀωστι, τὰ ῥήματα τοῦτα, and the use of ἀποστέω, which occurs only in Luke in an everyday, not specifically religious sense (Jeremias 1980:312).

Luke 24:12. This verse tells how Peter runs to the tomb, peers in to see only the cloths and then goes home wondering what has happened. The whole verse is omitted in manuscript D and in manuscripts of the Old Latin version. It is, however, today widely accepted as part of the original Lucan text, in the light of its inclusion in the best manuscripts as well as the cross-reference in Luke 24:24, where Luke states that some of the disciples went to the tomb. The fact that the same tradition occurs in a somewhat different form in John 20:3-10 points to the probability of Luke using a tradition or source similar to that used by John. Not only does the name Peter appear in both accounts, but there is also a considerable amount of verbal agreement between the two. Yet there are also differences, the most important of which is John's inclusion of "the other disciple" (cf, however, Lk 24:24 where Luke also uses the plural). The fact that the name Peter is used in Luke 24:12 while Simon is used in 24:34 again points to different sources or traditions. The question of whether John used Luke's information about the visit to the tomb
and expanded it (Neirynck 1984:172ff), or whether Luke and John both used some common (oral) tradition, still remains one to which there is no definite answer.

Traces of traditional material may especially be seen in the use of the historical praesens βλέπει, which is very strange since Luke avoids using Mark's historical praesens (92 times, according to Jeremias). On the other hand, ἀναστάς and ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον appear to be Lucan redaction. The last part of verse 12 also appears to be a Lucan addition, in the light of Luke's fondness of using θεωμακέων (Fitzmyer 1985: 1548) and τὸ κεφαλῆς.

In summary, one can therefore argue that Luke used Mark's story of the empty tomb as the basis of his own story, with some redactional changes here and there. In some places the possibility of other traditions seems apparent, but there is no compelling need to see some other consecutive narrative behind Luke's version. One should rather think of oral, isolated additions to the basic story (Marshall 1973:71). There are several traces of Lucan redaction in the verses where Luke adds to Mark's story, but there are on the other hand also traces of traditional material. By and large, Schweizer (1984:1f) warns of the complexity of distinguishing Luke's sources:

The extent to which Luke drew on other sources is an insoluble problem ... Comparison with Mark and Q shows how much he reproduces his sources in his own style ... On the other hand, he also imitates stylistic peculiarities of his sources when he is formulating his own material.

As far as Luke's intention with the redactional changes in this story is concerned, it should clearly be seen in keeping with the rest of chapter 24 as well as with the further development of the story in Acts:

Die Auferweckung des durch Israel abgelehnten Propheten Jesus, die Lukas im Rückgriff auf die alte kerygmatische Tradition pointiert als Tat Gottes darstellt, ist Voraussetzung für eine neue Stufe der heilsgeschichtlichen Entwicklung: die Zeit der Herrschaft des zur Rechten Gottes erhöhten Kyrios und Christos (Hoffmann 1979:504).

4 THE HISTORICITY OF THE EMPTY TOMB STORY

Turning to the historicity of the empty tomb, I am aware of all the problems this entails, not only as far as the nature of the sources is concerned, but also as far as philosophical and theological presuppositions are concerned. It is unfortunately not possible to give a detailed discussion within the scope of this paper, and therefore only the main points in the debate can be touched on. It is a well-known fact that the resurrection of Jesus itself is nowhere described, and that no-one witnessed it according to the New Testament. What we do have in the New Testament are two different strands of tradition testifying to the resurrection, namely the traditions of the empty tomb and
the traditions of the appearances of Jesus. Each of these two strands obviously has its own tradition- and transmission history. In the oldest stratum of tradition the two strands are still separate, with Mark reporting only the empty tomb and Paul reporting only appearances of Jesus. From a comparison of the different Gospels it becomes clear that there was a trend in the historical development of these traditions to draw the two strands of tradition closer together to an increasing extent (cf Pannenberg 1968:88f). Whereas Mark offers only an account of the empty tomb, Luke offers separate accounts of the empty tomb and appearances, while Matthew connects the empty tomb with an appearance, and John and the apocryphal Gospel of Peter go still further, with appearances taking place at the tomb.

An enquiry into the historicity of the empty tomb story has to start with the oldest New Testament witness concerning the resurrection of Jesus, namely 1 Corinthians 15:3b-5. Here Paul seems to cite an apparently old Christian formula, judging by the technical terms "delivered" and "received", the parallelism and stylised content, the proper names of Cephas and James, and non-Pauline and Semitic characteristics (cf Lehmann 1968:68-157). This formula is widely accepted as quite old, probably reaching back to within the first five years after Jesus' death, and its origin is usually looked for in the Jerusalem church, where Paul might have got acquainted with it (cf Miethe 1987:23).

The empty tomb is not mentioned in this formula, nor in any of Paul's letters. This fact has caused many scholars to conclude that the tradition of the empty tomb was of late origin, and unknown in the earliest traditions and to Paul. Mark's last verse, mentioning the silence of the women, is then often seen as Mark's way of explaining the late origin of the story.

Although the formula in 1 Corinthians 15 does not contain a reference to the empty tomb, it does contain the phrase "he was buried" between the death and the resurrection of Jesus. While it is maintained by some exegetes that the position of "he was buried" between the death and the resurrection implies the empty tomb, it is denied by many others (for a list of both views see Craig 1985:61). The champions of the historicity suggest that it is possible that the empty tomb is implied in the sequence of events related in the formula (cf Craig 1985:41). Besides that, they also argue that the tomb is alluded to in Peter's speech in Acts 2:24-32 and in Paul's speech in Antioch of Pisidia in Acts 13:29-31. They also see a possible implicit reference to the empty tomb in the phrase "on the third day" in 1 Corinthians 15:4. Since no-one saw the resurrection taking place, one possibility of explaining this phrase is that the women found the tomb empty on that day (cf Grass 1970:127-138; Fuller 1972:23-27; Craig 1985:42-50). These arguments are, however, speculative, and we remain uncertain whether Paul (and the oldest traditions) knew about the empty tomb.

Turning to the Gospel accounts of the empty tomb, it is notable that it is the only Easter report contained in all four Gospels. The agreement between
the Synoptics and John is usually interpreted as pointing to common traditional material employed by the evangelists. It is further notable that where John differs from the Synoptics, at least one Synoptic agrees with each incident described by John. Given John’s independence from the Synoptics, which is still widely accepted in spite of voices to the contrary (such as Neirynck 1984), these incidents are then seen as coming from traditions used by the evangelists.

Furthermore, and again in spite of voices to the contrary (such as Schenke 1969:53), the story could have been part of the pre-Marcan passion narrative (cf Pesch 1977). Among several other arguments in favour of this thesis is the fact that, except for the words of the angel, the story of the empty tomb is not kerygmatically coloured, which points to an old tradition.

First it is necessary, therefore, to pay more attention to the Marcan account. As is clear by now, we have reason to believe that Matthew and Luke depended on Mark for their empty tomb stories. The first question seems to be whether Mark invented the story himself or whether he used an older tradition, and if so, how much of Mark’s story may be ascribed to the tradition and how much to Mark himself.

It is generally agreed that he used an older tradition, but about his own contribution opinions vary from ascribing nothing of the story to Mark (Pesch 1977:520) to ascribing verses 1,3,4,7 and 8b to him (cf Schenke 1969:53-55). Currently we seem to be at an impasse about Mark’s redaction. Although there are some typical Marcan expressions and themes in the story, it should be kept in mind that Mark is possibly here following the pre-Marcan passion narrative which he was apparently not inclined to change.

In its present form Mark’s story presents many problems which cause critical scholars to see it as unhistorical. Among these problems are the fresh start at 16:1, the intention of the women to anoint the body two days after the burial has been completed, the list of women which does not agree with the lists in Mark 15:40 and 15:47, the seemingly legendary features of the angelophany as well as the miraculous rolling away of the stone, and the curious silence of the women after they have been charged by the angel to tell the disciples and Peter that the risen Jesus was going before them to Galilee. Small wonder that some scholars see the story as a legend (Ittel 1967:28-32; Grass 1970:20) or a myth (Perrin 1977:9-13) or a Kultütiologie (Schenke 1969:92).

Form-critically the story is exceptionally interesting (cf Pesch 1977:521-528). Not only does it contain motifs of rescue stories, but also of epiphany stories as well as of stories in which the fruitless search for a vanished or resurrected person is described (Entrückungslegende). Also here we seem to be at an impasse, because after all the years of discussing the form-critical aspects of the story we still know very little, if anything at all, about the story in its pre-Marcan form.
The preceding remarks pointed out that the story has a mixed form, and accordingly many scholars prefer to look at the story as composite, albeit without taking form-critical aspects into account (cf Kremer 1969:22-28; Hendrickx 1984:14). They distinguish two parts in the story: the women discovering the empty tomb and an angel revealing to them that Jesus has been raised. These two parts are then treated separately.

The first part deals with an "observable earthly event" (Hendrickx 1984:14) and the historicity of this part of the story is defended on the following grounds (cf also Kremer 1969:22-25; Von Campenhausen 1968:59):

1. the fact that something similar is found in the Gospel of John points to the fact that this story could be considerably older than the Gospel of Mark;
2. the early church would hardly have invented a story about women witnessing the empty tomb; it was in agreement with customs of the time that women would go to the tomb to mourn;
3. it seems as if the empty tomb was never disputed by Jesus' adversaries, but that they tried to give a different explanation of it;
4. it is hardly imaginable that the disciples would be able afterwards to preach the resurrection in Jerusalem without being able to point to an empty tomb.

The second part of the story (the angelophany) is described differently by the different Gospels, which seems to reflect the different concerns of the authors. Seeing that the message of the angel(s) contains the basic Easter message it is a small step to realise that each author let the angel(s) say what they themselves had to say to get the Easter message across in their own situation. The role of the angel(s) is therefore seen as a technical literary device used to express the idea that the meaning of something cannot be understood by man and therefore God has to reveal it through an angel (Hendrickx 1984:14).

Some scholars object to this kind of reasoning. Pesch (1977:537f) sees it as methodologically challengeable:

Ein Rückschluss auf die Historizität der Entdeckung des leeren Grabes Jesu mittels eines "Subtraktionsverfahrens", das alle legendarischen Züge aus der Erzählung ausscheidet und einen "historischen Kern" ermitteln will ..., ist methodologisch höchst anfechtbar, wie schon die einfache Überlegung zeigen kann, dass nach solchem Verfahren aus jeder Legende und jedem Märchen ein "historischer Kern" herausgeschält werden könnte.

With regard to the historicity of Luke's account a further question deals with Peter's visit to the tomb. As pointed out earlier, I am convinced that
Luke 24:12 was part of the original text and not a résumé of John 20:2-10 which was later added to Luke's text. Whether John used Luke's text and expanded it, is to my mind still impossible to answer at this stage, in spite of Neirynck's (1984) argument that he did. It remains a possibility that Luke and John both separately used a tradition about a visit to the tomb by one disciple or more. Luke again refers to the visit to the tomb in 24:24, but there he also mentions more than one visitor, just as John does.

But the fact that there might have been a tradition about a visit to the tomb still does not prove the historicity of the visit. It could have been an apologetic motif which was shaped by the fact that the witness of women was not seen as sufficient. It could also be seen as the coalescence of the appearance and the empty tomb traditions. It must, however, be pointed out that in the tradition of Peter's visit to the tomb the aim of the story could not have been to prove Peter's faith, for neither in Luke nor in John's account does Peter come to faith at the sight of the empty tomb.

So, what can we say about the historicity of the empty tomb? To my mind we cannot say for certain that it is historical or unhistorical, even though there might have been an early tradition about the tomb. I think that for us today it is just about impossible to imagine what the exact circumstances were in the years after Jesus' death, and whether it might have been necessary to invent the story for reasons that we might not be able to understand completely. It is just a matter of insufficient data that we have available. This is true of the discovery of the empty tomb as well as of Peter's visit to the tomb.

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