

The memorable invention of the death of Jesus

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The death story of Jesus of Nazareth has traditionally been understood as a matter of historical fact. The various versions of the story would seem to confirm a documented death scene. Nevertheless, critical appraisals of this material have raised numerous questions regarding the passion story. This article considers how the very structure of the story is a vital clue to the way in which the death of Jesus was invented. The Jewish tale of the suffering and vindication of the innocent one provides the memory locus for discovering meaning in the fate of Jesus. We find that the basic fact of the death tale of Jesus is that it was a fiction, authorising further elaborations for those who understood the craft of memory.

Introduction

At the origin of its haunting tradition the death of Jesus remains a traumatic event. The very matter and question of memory is from the outset a complex issue. Werner Kelber (2005) wisely notes:

Our earlier observation that the past exists only as remembered past applies with special force to the events surrounding the crucifixion. No event in Christian origins is less likely to be transmitted in its factual rawness, and no experience is more in need of mnemonic frames and mediating patterns, than Jesus' death. (p. 246)

Kelber not only is alert to the traumatic effect Jesus' death had on his followers, but recognises the need to be attentive to the very texture of the resulting memories. Certainly since the eighteenth century critical investigation has introduced novel perspectives on the death of Jesus. Most recently the public debate over the question of the historical Jesus has resumed the Enlightenment's agenda. The Jesus Seminar has gone on record, publishing their attempts to detect the historicity of the death of Jesus. Yet, what is clear from the present debate is that many, both scholars and believers, still share a common understanding of the tradition of the death of Jesus. They assume that the tradition delivers a report of what actually happened. Such a position is not only found among most conservative scholars. While admitting that the Gospel evidence is more complicated than what a literalist would allow, even liberal scholars assume that one can plausibly suppose that some history lies behind the later communities' constructions (Allison 2010:387–433).¹

Some basic observations

Let me begin with the following points:

In the first instance, except for the possibility of a lampooning Alexamenos graffito in the late second, early third century and a carved gemstone amulet from Syria (3rd CE) (cf. White 2010:133),² there is no iconographic evidence found featuring the death of Jesus until the fifth century (Snyder 1985).³ Thus, the oral and literary traditions were the sole media through which the memory of the death of Jesus was transmitted.

Secondly, we can find little mention, let alone description of crucifixion in ancient literature. Crucifixion was reserved for slaves and rebels; it was hardly considered worthy of taking up space on a costly scroll. There are, however, indirect hints of what this entailed, such as in the

1. Allison has attempted to produce a more common-sense investigation by attempting to show that Paul knew a pre-Markan narrative. He is not persuaded by Crossan's argument that the passion narrative is 'prophecy historicised'. He sees the evidence from Paul correlating with what he can determine from the later Gospel materials. Allison never considers the texture of the evidence in the pre-Pauline material and in the Gospel narratives. He would see indications of historical events from Paul and the Gospels. He does not consider how the pre-Pauline memories and the Gospel narratives were invented. He neglects the possibility that ancient memory had particular repertoires and structures.

2. The graffito shows a man standing in front of a donkey-headed victim on a T-shaped cross. The Greek text scrawls 'Alexamenos worships his god.' This mocking carving may well represent either an anti-Jewish or an anti-Jesus slur. The bloodstone intaglio shows a crucified Jesus, tied to a T-shaped cross. The Greek text invokes: 'Son, Father, Jesus Anointed'.

3. While there are images of Jesus as teacher and healer, there is nothing until the fifth century CE.

Gemma Augustea.⁴ This gives a rather clear indication of how the power relationships within the first century world were maintained and enforced through humiliation and torture. Cicero expresses the cultural bias that death by crucifixion should not be considered, let alone remembered:

The very name of 'the cross' should be absent not only from the body of Roman citizens but even from thought, eyes, and ears. For of all these things not only the occurrence and endurance but even the [legal] possibility, expectation, and finally the mention itself is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free person. (Cicero [45 BC]–Loeb Classic Library 1927)

Thirdly, we are dealing fundamentally with an oral culture. This means that the worth and workings of memory are crucial. For, without some memory pattern or formatting, there was no survival of meaning. With at least 85% of the population illiterate, mnemonic devices were part and parcel of everyone's cognitive repertoires. In light of this oral environment we need to be aware of the rhetorical aspects of the evidence under consideration.

Some questions immediately come to mind. For example, do the Gospel passion narratives display any clues of some sort of memory scheme? What were the Gospel writers doing when they composed their stories? Were they delivering 'the facts' or did they structure their material along other lines?

The usual scholarly assessment is that there is a mixture of report and editorial revision in the passion material. Some scholars continue to insist – without demonstrable evidence – that there was a 'kernel' of the passion narrative there from the beginning. But that long-standing assumption, as we shall see, becomes hard pressed when faced with the evidence of the developing Jesus traditions.

This brings me to the next point. The canonical death stories of Jesus are not simple reports of what happened. Rather, Source, Form and Redaction Criticism have demonstrated for quite some time that the canonical death stories are increasingly complicated narratives constructed to speak to the concerns of the particular first century communities (Brown 1994).⁵ At best the canonical Gospels are indirect witnesses to the historical Jesus. They are historical in so far as they indicate and witness to their communities' concerns and questions.

Furthermore, we know that there are material relationships among the canonical Gospels. The majority of New Testament scholars would accept the historical priority of Mark as well as the independent use of Mark by Matthew and Luke. And

4.Cf. 'Gemma Augustea', viewed on 20 September 2015 at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kunsthistorisches_Museum_Vienna_June_2006_031.png

5.Brown demonstrates the redactional structure of the each canonical gospel. It should be noted that, when Brown occasionally raises a question of historical fact, he invariably resolves his answer around the plausibility of the scene. But plausibility does not necessarily imply historical probability. For more on this see Arthur J. Dewey (2001), 'The death of Jesus: The fact of fiction and the fiction of fact'.

now a number of scholars have gone on record that the writer of John quite likely knew Mark.

Moreover, scholars have also concluded that there is only one basic passion narrative behind all the Gospel accounts (Funk 1998:246–247). This judgement is greatly due to what may be the most intriguing aspect to all the passion accounts: one coherent and consecutive story runs through all five versions of the death of Jesus.⁶ Such a dramatically similar pattern cannot be accounted for if each writer worked independently of the rest. The question over the direction of the relationships becomes paramount. Which account of the existing five passion narratives was the earliest?

From these few observations we can reiterate what recent scholarship has confirmed: that the traditions of the death of Jesus are anything but simple. A complex layering of the historical evidence is a requisite first step in coming to terms with the developing passion traditions. Allow me to outline what I consider to be the major historical stepping stones of the passion narrative traditions. Of course, all that follows, while subject to immense debate, can serve as the starting point for a critical discussion on memory and the invention of the death of Jesus:

1. The Sayings Gospel (Q). If we take the presence of the Q-gospel seriously we have to take into account that Q does not have a passion narrative. The death of Jesus becomes absorbed into the tradition of prophets' deaths (cf. Lk 11:49–51). There is nothing beyond an allusion to his death (Scott 2010:14–141).⁷ Moreover, the Gospel of Thomas continues evidently in this tradition. Not only is there no passion narrative, there is no mention at all of the death of Jesus in Thomas. In addition, the Didache, which has been recently dated within the midst of the first century, contains not a hint of the death of Jesus (Milavec 2003:884–888).⁸ In other words, we have evidence of Jesus' traditions that did not see the need for a narrative of the death of Jesus as a *sine qua non*, a central focus.
2. Paul already knows a tradition, which speaks of the death of Jesus. He evidently learned of this from Syrian followers of Jesus. We can say briefly two things. Firstly, in this pre-Pauline tradition the death of Jesus was understood as a heroic death, a martyr's sacrifice (Rom. 3:21–26; Williams 1980:241–280). Secondly, he has inherited a tradition about the meal commemorating the

6.While one can make the case that one coherent structure resides in all the Gospel versions it would be a logical mistake to assume that this implies actual historicity. The structure may well be a clue to the memory pattern composed to give meaning, not a factual report.

7.Brandon Scott (2010) has argued that the Q-gospel knows of Jesus' death by crucifixion, but it has no passion account and does not understand Jesus' death as salvific. Once again it employs the Deuteronomic pattern to understand his death. The Q-gospel as part of the wisdom tradition views Jesus as the righteous one, who was God's prophet, was rejected and murdered by his enemies and was taken up, assumed, and will then stand in judgement at the end. The pattern is remarkably similar to that of the righteous one in the Wisdom of Solomon.

8.Milavec represents a new assessment of the dating of the Didache. White (2004:331) would take the majority position of dating the text to the early to middle second century CE. Milavec may well be correct that many of the sayings in the Didache can be dated to the middle of the first century.

death of this hero (1 Cor. 11:23–26). This heroic tradition may be the basis of the hymn found in Phillipians 2:6–11.⁹

3. There is also evidence of a citations tradition in the pre-Pauline material. 1 Corinthians 15:3 furnishes an instance of another tradition arising after the death of Jesus (1 Cor 15: ³Among the very first things I *passed on to you* was what I myself *also received* as tradition: *God's Anointed died for our sins according to the scriptures,* ⁴and was buried, and *raised on the third day according to the scriptures.* – Scholars Version). In this tradition, Jewish scriptures are applied to gesture at the fate of Jesus.

Besides 1 Corinthians 15:3, one can point to Mark 14:21, 49; Matthew 26:56; Luke 24:26–27; John 19:36 and Acts 2:22–36 as indications that the early communities were in the habit of using specific scriptural citations in an attempt to come to grips with the meaning of Jesus' death.

Mark 14:21 The son of Adam departs just as the scriptures predict ...

Mark 14:49 I was with you in the temple area day after day teaching and you didn't lift a hand against me. But the scripture must come true!

Matt 26:56 All of this happened so the writings of the prophets would come true. Then all the disciples deserted him and ran away.

Luke 24:26–27 Wasn't the Anointed One destined to undergo these things and enter into his glory? Then, starting with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted for them every passage of scripture that referred to himself.

John 19:36 This happened so the scripture that says, 'No bone of is shall be broken,' would come true, as well as another scripture that says, 'They shall look at the one they have pierced.'

Acts 2:22–36 'Israelites, hear these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man endorsed to you by God through powerful deeds, wonders and signs which God performed through him in your midst, as you yourselves know – this one, handed over according to the determined will and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and liquidated by lawless hands. But God, dissolved the moans of death, raised him up, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David speaks about him: 'I keep my eyes always on the Lord, for he is at my right hand that I may not be disturbed; so my heart is happy, and my tongue cheered; indeed, my flesh will live in hope. You will not abandon my life to the Underworld, nor let your Holy One see decay. You made known to me the ways of life; you will fill me with gladness by your presence'. [Ps 16:8–11] 'Brothers, I can boldly speak to you of the patriarch David that he is dead and buried – his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn him an oath that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, [Ps 132:11] he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Anointed, that he was not abandoned to the Underworld, nor did his flesh see decay.

9. It may well be that Paul learned of these traditions from the Syrian Jesus followers who turned the social disaster of Jesus' shameful crucifixion into the honourable death of a Jewish martyr. The language of 'dying for' emerges from the Hellenistic hero language (such as in 4 Macc. 16:11–23; 17:8–10, 11–16, 17–22). Due to the non-Pauline language found in Phil. 2: 6–11, the introductory remark of verse 5, and the concluding connection of verse 12 ('In light of this, my dear friends,'), one can easily remove this material from the surrounding exhortatory remarks (vv. 5, 12–13). Yet, although verses 6–11 can be isolated as a pre-Pauline hymn (vv. 10, 11 ['every knee should bend,' 'every tongue declare'] suggest liturgical actions) numerous debates have been launched over the source, background, structure, redaction, and meaning of the piece. Space does not permit an exposition of the various backgrounds argued for the hymn. The Jewish Wisdom tradition (e.g. Prov. 8–9) may well be the crucible for this material. Indeed, others have suggested more specifically that the suffering servant theme from Second Isaiah or that of the vindication of the suffering righteous one (Wis. Sol. 2–5) may afford the basis for this hymn. Finally, the redeemer myth found throughout the ancient world is also a candidate for providing the imaginative matrix for this piece. For more on this, see the cameo essay 'The "Christ hymn" in Phillipians 2:6–11' in Dewey *et al.* (2010:193–196).

This Jesus God raised up – all of us are witnesses. Elevated to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he rained this down which you see and hear. For David didn't climb to the skies; but he does say, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right, until I install your enemies as your footstool'. [Ps 110:1] Let the whole house of Israel know definitely know then that God has made him both 'Lord' and 'Anointed', this Jesus whom you crucified.'

It is important to note that the early communities were not recalling the 'facts' of the death of Jesus. They were about the business of making sense of it. Here it is not a question of history remembered but of prophecy historicised. They began looking for prophecies that would help them understand the social disgrace of the death of Jesus. The use of scriptural citations of Psalms (Ps. 2:1,7; 16:8–11; 22:1, 18, 22; 69:21, 30; 110:1; 132:11) and Prophets (Am. 8:9; Is. 50:6, 7; Zch. 12:10) became a shorthand way of dealing with the meaning of Jesus' death. Thus, each citation was a creative connection by an anonymous member of the Jesus communities. The death of Jesus was provocative enough to call for a ransacking of the religious memories. *The citations play upon the themes of persecution and vindication, staple rhythmic components of the Psalms.*¹⁰ However, it should be understood that there is not as yet a fully developed narrative such as we find later in Peter, Mark, Matthew, Luke and John.¹¹

4. It has been noted for some time that the passion narrative of Mark displays the elements of the Tale of the Persecution and Vindication of the Innocent One (Nickelsburg 1980:153–180). More of this later.
5. More recently, Crossan and Dewey have independently argued for an earlier version – P – of the Gospel of Peter. Dewey has shown that the entire first layer of P can be located on the template of the Tale of the Persecution and Vindication of the Innocent One (Crossan 1988; cf. Dewey 1998:53–69).
6. The Synoptic followers of Mark apparently have utilised the Markan base, adding further material, while typically reworking and eliminating other pieces.
7. The Gospel of John shows a remarkable reworking of the passion narrative. If the writer of John knew of Mark, or an earlier version of the passion narrative, he, in his singularly creative way, has revised the passion narrative into a highly dramatic version.

10. For example: Persecution (Ps 2:1–2; 22:1–8; 69:20–21); Vindication (Ps 2:7–8; 22:22–24; 69:30–33).

11. An example of how much of the later Gospel narrative is indebted to the building blocks of scriptural citations can be found in Mark 14–15.

The Scribal antecedents of Mark

1. Clear references to the Psalms

| | | |
|-------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 14:18 | Betrayal by friends | Ps 41:9 |
| 14:34 | A soul full of sorrow | Pss 42:6, 11; 43:5 |
| 15:24 | Garments divided | Ps 22:18 |
| 15:29 | Derision of onlookers | Pss 22:7; 109:25 |
| 15:34 | 'My God, my God ...' | Ps 22:1 |
| 15:36 | Vinegar to drink | Ps 69:21 |

2. Thematic allusions

| | | |
|--------------|-------------------------|--|
| 14:1 | Conspiracy to kill | Pss 31:4; 35:4; 38:12; 71:10 |
| 14:56–57, 59 | False Witnesses | Pss 27:12; 35:11; 109:2 |
| 14:61; 15:5 | Silence before accusers | Pss 38:14–16; 39:9 |
| 15:20, 29 | Mocking | Pss 22:7; 31:11; 35:19–25; 69:20; 109:25 |

With these observations in mind, I should stress the point that the long-standing assumption that there must have been some primitive passion narrative at the very outset of the Jesus Movement falls in the face of the earliest extant evidence. The Sayings Gospel only hints of the prophetic death of Jesus. And allusions to a death are associated with a Deuteronomic pattern. Neither does Paul help sustain that assumption. The pre-Pauline materials have already taken on the indications of a heroic recasting. But there is no sustained narrative. Rather, it would seem that the evidence for a passion narrative comes somewhat later with either an early version of the Gospel of Peter (pre 70 CE) or the Gospel of Mark (70+ CE). With Paul there is evidence of the use of scriptural citations to touch on Jesus' fate. But Paul does not go beyond indicating that Jesus was crucified. There is no evidence for any interest in a narrative unfolding of his death. We can also note that the Gospel of Thomas and the Didache argue for at least some of the tradition progressing without any concern over such a narrative.

A second point comes from my own work on the Passion Narrative in John (Dewey 2001:59–70). I have argued that in the Fourth Gospel, 'history' is not what we moderns would want it to be. The account of the final hours of Jesus is actually a creative invention that allows the listener the chance to participate, to 'see' the meaning in the death scene of Jesus (cf. Jn. 19:35–37). This recognition of the creative 'memory' of the writer of the Fourth Gospel has led me to rethink a number of presuppositions regarding the critical apprehension of the death stories of Jesus.

A further issue comes from realising the acoustic world of the first century. As we mentioned above, we are dealing with an oral culture. This means that the worth and workings of memory are crucial, for, without some memory device, there is no survival of the meaning. Do the passion narratives then display any clues to some sort of memory scheme? Indeed, in contemplating the use of a memory scheme, we must further wonder about the rhetorical 'invention' of that scheme.

More questions arise. When the various traditions are considered, can we begin to see that imaginative acts were underway to give some sort of 'location' to the fate of Jesus? The Q-gospel material apparently locates the death of Jesus within the familiar typology of the deaths of Jewish Prophets (Lk 11:49–51). On the other hand, the Pauline material can be read as going in a number of directions. One can argue that a pre-Pauline understanding of the death of Jesus locates the fate of Jesus within the orbit of heroic Jewish martyrs. Yet, noting that in 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 Jewish sacred writings were used to interpret Jesus' death does not help us very much, except to indicate the connection of Jesus' fate to a written tradition.¹²

The matter of location becomes explicit when we reach the first evidence of extended passion narratives. Now it is either in the

12. There is also the further issue of what Paul did to what he heard about the death of Jesus. Does he, for instance, in Galatians 3:10–14 introduce the notion of shame, as well as blessing and curse to the death of Jesus (that he has 'graphically portrayed') to locate the fate of Jesus within the current debate over gentile acceptability?

first layer of Peter (P)¹³ or in Mark that we have the first extended narrative of the death of Jesus. Here we see that the story is, in fact, structured along the lines of the Tale of the Persecution and Vindication of the Innocent One. The meticulous effort of George Nickelsburg (1972) has demonstrated not only that this story emerged from Hellenistic Judaism, but also that the constituent elements of that story pattern form the passion narrative of Mark (Nickelsburg 1980). The structure of this tale is as follows:

The actions and claims of an innocent person provoke his opponents to conspire against him. This leads to an accusation, trial, condemnation, and ordeal. In some instances this results in his shameful death. The hero of the story reacts characteristically, expressing his innocence, frustration, or trust in prayer, while there are also various reactions to his fate by characters in the tale. Either at the brink of death or in death itself the innocent one is rescued and vindicated. This vindication entails the exaltation and acclamation of the hero as well as the reaction and punishment of his opponents.

I have argued elsewhere that the earliest layer (P) of Peter provides this pre-Markan source (Dewey 1990:101–127; Dewey 2008:61–74). But this is not the place to defend that thesis. What I would underline is the emergence of the pattern of the Tale of the Persecution and Vindication of the Innocent One.¹⁴

I contend that with this pattern of the Tale of the Persecution and Vindication of the Innocent One we have evidence of a social memory scheme. For those who would dispute the priority of an early level (P) of the Gospel of Peter and see Mark as issuing the earliest passion narrative, the point still stands. The scheme of the Innocent Sufferer has surfaced in the Jesus tradition. What does this suggest?

It indicates that, for the author of P (the earliest level of Gospel of Peter), or for Mark, to remember, he had to find a

13. My reconstruction of the earliest layer ('P') is:

2 (3c) And he turned him over to the people on the day before the Unleavened Bread, their feast. 3 (1) They took the Lord and kept pushing him along as they ran; and they would say, "Let's drag the son of God along, since we have him in our power!" (2) And they threw a purple robe around judgment seat and said, 'Judge justly, King of Israel.' (3) And one of them brought a crown of thorns and set it on the head of the Lord. (4) And others standing about would spit in his eyes, 'Let's pay proper respect to the son of God.' 4 (1) And they brought two criminals and crucified the Lord between them. But he himself remained silent, as if in no pain. (2) And when they set up the cross, they put an inscription on it, 'This is the king of Israel.' (3) And they piled his clothing in front of him; then they divided it among themselves, and gambled for it. (4) But one of those criminals reproached them and said, 'We're suffering for the evil that we've done, but this fellow, who has become a savior of humanity, what wrong has he done to you?' (5) And they got angry at him and ordered that his legs not be broken so he would die in agony. 5 (1) It was midday and darkness covered the whole of Judea. They were confused. (2) And one of them said, 'Give him vinegar mixed with something bitter to drink.' And they mixed it and gave it to him to drink. (3) And they fulfilled all things and brought to completion the sins on their head. (4) Now many went about with lamps, and, thinking that it was night, they laid down. (5) And the Lord cried out, saying, 'My power, (my) power you have abandoned me.' When he said this, he was taken up. (6) And at that moment, the veil of the Jerusalem temple was torn in two. 6 (1) And then they pulled the nails from the Lord's hands and set him on the ground. And the whole earth shook and there was great fear. 8 (1) All the people were moaning and beating their breasts, and saying, 'If his death has produced these overwhelming signs, he must have been entirely innocent!'

14. The earliest layer (P) of the Gospel of Peter (GP 2:3c-5:1a, 5:2-6:1, 8:1b) may well have been the mythic construction utilised by the Hellenistic community. The earliest layer of P was fabricated out of biblical citations (GPet 3:4, Is. 50:6-7, Zch 12:10; GP 4:1a, Is 53:12; GP 4:1b, Is 50:7, 53:7; GP 4:3, Ps 22:18; GP 5:1, Am 8:9; GP 5:2, Ps 69:21; GP 5:5a, Ps 22:1) and set out according to the literary components of the Tale of the Innocent Sufferer. We see the typical components of that tale: condemnation (2.3c), ordeal (3:1.2a), investiture, acclamation (3.2b, 3), ordeal (3:4, 4:1a), reaction (4:1b), acclamation (4:2), reaction (4:3-5), punishment: (5:1a), ordeal (5:2), punishment (5:3,4) prayer (5:5a), rescue (5:5b) vindication (5:6-6:1) reaction/acclamation (8:1b).

'place' or schema to locate memory; he had to re-member by going back to the imaginative repertoires of his time. As we just mentioned, the work of George Nickelsburg has shown this repertoire of memory to be the enormous tradition of the Tale of the Persecution and Vindication of the Innocent One. I would further contend that this scheme of the Tale of the Innocent One has been the memory bed for Matthew, Luke, and, most probably John.

Carruthers and the invention of memory

Mary Carruthers (1990, 1998) has pointed the way to recognising ancient memory as an active craft. Carruthers has made a major advance in the understanding of ancient memory. While appreciative of the contributions of Frances Yates (1966) to the study of memory, Carruthers differs with Yates' assessment of memory. For Yates the art of memory was to repeat previously stored material. There is a static quality to memory despite its fascinating, if not preposterous, constructions. Carruthers (1998) counters by arguing:

The goal of rhetorical mnemotechnical craft was not to give students a prodigious memory for all the information they might be asked to repeat in an examination, but to give an orator the means and wherewithal to invent his material, both beforehand and – crucially – on the spot. *Memoria* is most usefully thought of as a compositional art (:p. 9).

Carruthers (1998:11) places the creative act of memory within the domain of ancient rhetoric, not psychology. In effect, memory for Carruthers is implicitly social, embedded in the discourse of the day. The act of memory starts with rhetorical *inventio*. This means that memory is not what we moderns usually consider it to be. It is not a reiteration or a representation. Instead, it is a crafting of images as well as a construction of a place for the images to inhabit. *Inventio* means both the construction of something new (the memory-store) and the storage of what is remembered. For Carruthers then *memoria* is a locational memory. Further, *the shape or foundation of a composition must be thought of as a place-where-one-invents* (Carruthers 1998:12).

There is also the matter of forgetting. Carruthers (1998:57) quite clearly has argued that forgetting is not erasure. Rather, forgetting is essentially a displacement. Within the oral competition of the ancient world, there was a struggle for space. This also included memory space, especially the location of public memories. When forgetting occurs, it comes about through a displacement or trans-lation of images. A better pattern has been invented to locate and order the images.

This superstructure or memory location can be called by another name: a commonplace. I use this because it alludes to those things that are shared. It can also mean a public memory. The Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. is a recent example of the construction of a 'commonplace' where memories can be located and where future memory construction is 'authorised' by the location itself. Jewish

midrash is another example of creating a commonplace. One can construct a tale in which to locate and re-member various scriptural lines.¹⁵

Finally, in contrast to the modern assumptions about ancient memory, it should be noted that ancient memory was heuristic, not simply mimetic. The work of memory was not to re-present, not to reduplicate, but to construct, to deliver a place for images. This is where one discovers meaning. Of course, this contrasts greatly with the assumptions of many modern biblical scholars. They tend to look at the passion narratives as documents, as recording what was, essentially, 'the facts'. While most would distinguish between the editorial hand and the original report or witness, there would be, nevertheless, the assumption that the nature of the text is that of a document. Indeed, one can certainly note that the modern familiarity with both the photograph and the phonograph has contributed to this sense that the evidence has a documentary nature to it.

The modern distinction between fact and fiction, between memory as reiteration and an unreal imagination, was just not that crucial to the ancients. The very texture of the evidence, I would submit, points in a rather different direction.¹⁶

The crafting of the Passion Tradition

From what has been presented it becomes possible to re-envision the growth and dynamics of the traditions about the death of Jesus. Firstly, one can say that for the composers of the death tradition it was not simply a matter of recalling the death of Jesus; rather, it was a searching effort to discover meaning by finding an imaginative location in which they could perform the craft of memory. For those who would remember, the basic task was to 'invent' a *locus* for the death of Jesus. It was not a matter of simply relating the facts. Instead, it was a matter of invention and inventory. Specifically this means that modern investigators should not look immediately for 'the facts', for a simple representation of what happened. One should look, rather, for how the memory has been crafted and structured. One can then see what has been enfolded in that memory structure.¹⁷ It would only be after this assessment that one could begin to determine indirectly at best what are, the 'facts of the case'.

Let us go back to my earlier observations about the Sayings Gospel's version of the fate of Jesus. The writer of the Sayings Gospel placed the death of Jesus within the typological

15.The World Trade Center in New York after September 9, 2001 has effectively become another 'space' for memory. The continued debate over the site was actually a struggle to determine how the event is to be remembered.

16.Carruthers (1998) puts it this way:

The Biblical notion of remembering has tended to be dismissed, until quite recently, as 're-created memory', scarcely different from outright lying, and of no interest in the philosophy of mind at all. Instead, a 'storehouse' model of memory, and the idea that memory is 'of the past', has been emphasized to such a degree that memory has been accorded only a reiterative, reduplicative role – all else is 'unreal' and thus 'untruthful'. (p. 68)

17.The key to understanding the passion material is to worry about the 'texture' of the text. By recognizing the basic matrix or pattern in which the scenes and citations are delivered, one begins to understand that this rhetorical invention was a furtherance of the Jewish midrash of the Suffering Innocent One.

structure of the deaths of Jewish prophets (Lk. 11:49–51). This does not necessarily lend itself to an extensive elaboration. Indeed, the focus of the Sayings Gospel lies elsewhere. The teachings and sayings of Jesus seem to carry the tradition forward.

The pre-Pauline material locates the death of Jesus within the commonplace orbit of the heroic martyrs of Hellenistic Judaism. Paul takes over this tradition, while at the same time dislodging this memory pattern by translating the fate of Jesus into a more imperial location. Yet, for Paul the story of the vindication of Jesus does not focus upon the extended story pattern found in the Tale of the Suffering Innocent One.

It was, indeed, the choice of the overarching story pattern of the Suffering Innocent One that carried the day for the social crafting of the memory of the death of Jesus.

The earlier version (P) of Peter may well have been the first attempt at locating the various scriptural conjunctions within the overarching tale of the suffering and vindication of the innocent. In contrast to the prevailing style of this tradition (e.g. 2 Macc. 7, where specific characters are given for protagonists and antagonists), this story apparently follows more closely the narrative style of the Wisdom of Solomon, where the only one entitled is the 'just one', the 'Son of God'. With the use of the title 'the Lord' we are only one step removed from reading the story of the righteous one as a type.

We should note that in this version there is no assigning of blame for the killing of Jesus to any of the authorities. Rather, the 'people' are responsible for the death of Jesus. The vindication of the victim occurs at death, where the lord is 'taken up'. The rhetorical effect of the early fragment is twofold: to convince the audience that the lord is innocent and acceptable to God (*dikaios*) and that the 'people' are sinful, yet able to repent.

The example of the lord who is nobly patient to the end delivers narrative proof of his fidelity (*pistis*). The heroic allusions we have noted earlier in the early pre-Pauline traditions are becoming fleshed out. The rescue of his spirit by God and the accompanying tremors substantiate the validity of such a virtuous one. Not only is this victim sarcastically dubbed a son of God and ironically entitled 'King of Israel', but he is declared in the midst of his humiliating ordeal a 'savior of humanity'.

The narrative fits very much the situation of a mixed Hellenistic community. The narrative appeals to two different audiences: Jews and gentiles. By the fact that they would have been carrying the social stigma or blame of moral inferiority (*vis-à-vis* the truly human Jews), the gentiles would be able to identify with the victim so humiliated. The Jewish audience would be startled by the role of the 'people' in this narrative. The people, at first caught up in the persecution and execution of the innocent one, are able, after decisive signs of divine approval are given, to turn in repentance, thereby offering to the audience a model of reconsidering their stance and status.

Both sides thus could identify with the 'just one'. The fabulation would create the mythic grounds for a mixed and reconciled association. The narrative structure provides the threads of the vindicated just one, whose beneficial function for humanity is to unite listeners of the story in a novel association in an effort to remove the social stigma and shame that went hand in hand with social negotiation in the first century. The full-bodied telling of the story of the vindicated innocent concretises the possibility of imaginatively crossing social boundaries first in the narrative and then in social interaction.

Those who saw themselves as inferior, within the pyramidal power structure of the Roman world, who were understood as less than human, could see in such constructions a way to reframe their existence and future. It was never then a question of reporting the story of the death of Jesus. No one was interested in handing on some factual account for posterity. Rather, the construction of the story of the fate of Jesus attempted to breach the mythoi that were dominating the social world of the first century.

But it is Mark that provides the authorising locus and commonplace. The explicit use of citation formulae by Mark indicates that the writer can comfortably place the citations tradition within the pattern of the Suffering Innocent One. Moreover, this structure authorises, that is, it gives the basis for further re-telling and elaboration, as the story pattern gets filled in and revised.

The passion narrative of Mark carries the skeletal structure of the Suffering Innocent Tale: Provocation (11:15–17, 12:1–11; 14:3–9?), Conspiracy (11:18; 12:12–13; 14:1–2; 14:10–11), Decision, (14:3–9; 14:35–36; 14:41–42; 14:62?, 15:29–32?), Trust, (14:35–36), Obedience, (14:3–109; 14:35–36; 14:62?), Accusation (14:57–61; 15:2–3), Trial, (14:53–64; 15:1–15), Condemnation, (14:64; 15:15), Protest (Eliminated when accusation is true), Prayer, (35–36; 15:34), Assistance (15:9–14; 15:21), Ordeal, (14:65; 15:16–20; 15:29–30; 15:31–32; 15:36), Reactions, (14:63; 15:5), Rescue, (14:62), Vindication, (12:10–11; 14:62; 15:38; 15:39; 16:4–7), Exaltation, (14:62; 15:26?), Investiture, (15:17), Acclamation, (15:18; 15:26; 15:39), Reactions, (15:39), Punishment, (12:9; 12:36; 12:40; 13:2; 14:21; 15:38).

Matthew and Luke recognised the valuable structure provided by Mark. Their revisions are proof that the memory gamble worked. Whether it was P or Mark, an imaginative commonplace has been constructed and in which the memory work on the death of Jesus can continue. The story pattern of the Suffering Innocent One is true, not because of the particulars of its content (mimetic memory) but because its form can allow the one remembering to find things out, because it can cue 'new' memories. Matthew and Luke engage in translating other material into this story pattern. Whether they created this other material or it existed prior to their application, these writers have essentially taken the Suffering Innocent Tale as the template for crafting their memories. Thus, for example, the notorious 'blood curse' passage in Matthew 27:24–25 has been inserted into the scene already constructed by Mark 15:6–15. Matthew is not adding a new fact, thereby correcting or updating the historical

record. Rather, he is elaborating upon one of the elements of the Tale of the Suffering Innocent One as well as directing his gaze at his contemporary fellow Jews at the end of the first century. Such an insertion into the memory structure of Mark points up the *'intentio'* of Matthew.

In light of our earlier considerations the crafting of the death story of Jesus emerged from the primary communities of the late first century movement of the Anointed. The tellers of this tale were not recounting 'facts', nor were they establishing non-negotiable lines for future generations.

If we return to the Gospel of Mark, we see that the writer linked the Tale of this Suffering Innocent with the doom of Jerusalem. He crafted (or recrafted GPet) to make sense of the deaths of those in his community. Another way of saying this is that the extended narrative of the death of Jesus came into play as a means of delivering meaning to those who were on the edge of death. The Markan writer, for example, not only constructed the Gethsemane scene, he placed the utterance of the community ('Abba') upon Jesus' lips. Their experience of martyrdom filled in the narrative gaps.

What should not be lost in this assessment is that the Tale of the Suffering Innocent originated with Jews who were confronted by events that caused them to question why the innocent should suffer. The story originally had emerged under the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes IV and allowed people to speak out of the conviction that God is just and will not forget the faithful ones. In effect, the story was one of solidarity with those who go unjustly to their deaths. It was not told to distance the sufferer from the questions, aspirations, anxieties, and fears of the tellers of the tale. They found in telling that story lines of fundamental hope and common assurance.

Sadly the story of Jesus as the suffering innocent one has long since been cast from its historical and imaginations moorings. Centuries of subsequent reinterpretation have transmogrified a story of Jewish solidarity into a triumphant pageant of Christian sadism. Genuine solidarity has been replaced by the virtual reality of vicarious atonement. More ironic is the fact that a tale, generated by Jews to speak of their sense of solidarity with this innocent one, has long since been used as a lethal weapon against his people.

The Gospel of Matthew was written for a Jewish community sometime after the fall of Jerusalem (85 C.E.). As Jews attempted to rebuild after this seismic disaster, two groups remained who contended for determining the future of Israel. While the Pharisees were gathering at Jamnia, recollecting the oral traditions through the composition of the Mishnah, the community of Matthew held that they had the true interpretation of Torah.

Jesus the Anointed, the embodiment of God's Wisdom, was the prism through which they interpreted the traditions (5-7; 22:34-40). The Matthaean community saw the Pharisees as the primary competition for Jewish leadership. The polemic

of Matthew 23 comes from that perceived threat. The death story of Jesus in Matthew is taken principally from its Markan source. Matthew is quite self-conscious of Mark's use of the tale of the suffering innocent one. When one inspects the additions Matthew makes to the Markan material, one can see that he intensifies this thematic. Matthew adds particular material: 26:3, 57 ('palace of Caiaphas'); 26:15 ('30 pieces of silver'); 26:25 ('Judas ... so'); 26:28c ('for forgiveness of sins'); 26:50 ('Friend ...'); 26:52-54 ('Put up sword ... scriptures fulfilled'); 27:3-10 (Death of Judas); 27:19 (Pilate's wife); 27:24-25 (Blood curse); 27:40b, 43 ('Son of God'); 27:51b-53; 27:62-66 (tomb guard). We can observe that Matthew continues to reinforce the elements of the Tale of the suffering innocent one. More characters are introduced as opponents and/or aids (Caiaphas, Pilate's wife). Further details are given ('palace of Caiaphas', '30 pieces of silver', Judas' death, Pilate's wife's dream). The innocence of Jesus is further underscored (no violence, why Judas dies, the request of Pilate's wife, the blood curse scene (hand washing, irony), the explicit use of 'Son of God' (cf. Wis. Sol.).

Written at the end of the first century or early in the second century the Gospel of Luke absorbs the Markan passion structure and delivers a typology of Jesus for the Lukan community to imitate. The death of Jesus is not heroically redemptive (as in Mark); nor is it revelatory (as in John). The death of Jesus becomes a pattern for imitation. Luke presents Jesus as an innocent sufferer par excellence who undergoes the agony of martyrdom.

Luke's insertions (23:6-16; 23:27-32; 23:40-43) into his Markan source provide a constant repetition of the innocence of Jesus during the trial and death scenes. Each addition illustrates Jesus in extremis and yet 'in command' of the situation. The martyrdom of Jesus becomes the paradigm for making sense of the ambiguities the community will meet as they continue to exist in the Empire.

The death of Jesus is the dramatic focal point for the Gospel of John. Even before the passion narrative (ch. 18-19) the writer prepares his audience with three passion predictions carrying a distinct nuance. John 3:14, playing upon the image of Moses lifting up the bronze serpent for all to see and be healed, focuses upon the 'elevation of the Son of Adam' so that, by believing, people can have real life. In John 8:28 the Johannine Jesus declares that when he is 'elevated' people will know that 'I Am' (*ego eimi*). The death of Jesus becomes a means of revealing the divine (name). Lastly, in John 12:32-34 Jesus declares that, when elevated, he will be the focal point for all.

In sum, instead of predicting the fate of Jesus, the Johannine passion sayings throw the audience forward in anticipation. By the time one comes to the death scene of Jesus the listeners will have been tutored into seeing this death as a revelatory possibility.

Furthermore, the passion narrative tradition has been greatly recast by the Fourth Evangelist. One sees this story from an ironic perspective. The dramatically structured trial before

Pilate, the crucifixion and death, and the events immediately following Jesus' last breath, demand a perspective that has already been gained from experience with the first part of the Gospel. The attentive reader begins to hear these scenes within the earlier overtures. The death of Jesus is not redemptive, not a martyr's scene. It is the epiphany that had long been intimated.¹⁸ Each Johannine scene is constructed to bring the hearer of the story in direct confrontation with the Word. With the fourth Gospel one never really leaves the foot of the cross. Every reading becomes a possible realisation of the revelation of the One who so loved the universe.

In reconsidering the death story of Jesus we have begun to re-envision how the early followers came up with the very shape of their story. The fragmentary evidence from the Q-gospel and Paul to the various passion narratives has to be assessed not simply for the 'facts of the case', but by the very texture of the evidentiary material. We have been left with the workings of memory on a number of fronts. Moreover, it is necessary to consider what would have been the repertoire of the Jewish followers of Jesus in the post mortem period. How would they have handled such a traumatic event? The modern interpreter cannot rely on a 'reasonable' common sense analysis. Nor can we rely on the scientific categories of the present. It is crucial to take into consideration the ways in which the ancients remembered. One typical response by first century Jews to traumatic events was the use and citation of their sacred texts. Another was the cultural typology of the hero. We also noted that the deuteronomic pattern lingered in the shadows for the Q material. But it is with the emergence of the pattern of the Suffering and Vindication of the Innocent that we can detect a full-blown use of rhetorical composition. The Tale provided the memory locus for telling the story of the death of Jesus. Such a memory structure was already culturally in place. Moreover, this structure authorised others not only to retell the story but also to generate variations and improvements for subsequent communities. The basic fact of the death tale of Jesus is that it was a memorable fiction,

18. If the historicising of prophecy was the earliest layer of the tradition concerning the death of Jesus and, if this prophetic tradition was formatted into an extended narrative through the genre of the Suffering and Vindication of the Innocent One, then what we find, for example, in John 19:31–37 is a further layer of this creative work. Here we can see how the use of scripture is connected to the developing narrative tradition, thereby augmenting it and causing further interpretive growth. Verse 35 is a later (and distinctly Johannine) insertion into a scene that had been generated from the scriptural quotation (and thus, in keeping with the historicizing of prophecy). The bone-breaking scene in P may have had a scriptural basis (Ps 34:20). The water and blood, on the other hand, may be John's creation, perhaps reflecting the community's prior reflection on the paschal lamb and Zechariah (cf. Zch.12:10).

authorising further elaborations for those who understood the craft of memory.

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