

Memory and Manuscript in the Performance of Mark's Passion and Resurrection Narrative

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Deep in the collective memory of biblical scholarship lie the pictures of the editors of the Pentateuch and the Synoptic Gospels sitting at their desks with the scrolls or codices of J, E, or P or Mark and Q copying first one and then the other source into their new editions of the Mosaic and Jesus traditions. However, virtually all of the ancient pictures of ancient writers show them seated on a chair or stool writing on their laps. And the practice of writing in relatively narrow columns may also have been an adaptation to writing on the surface of the thigh. To my knowledge, there are no pictures of ancient writers with three manuscripts spread out before them. In fact, writing in the manner of this traditional picture is physically impossible for someone writing on their lap. How does one hold a scroll with one hand and write with the other? It appears that this picture in our deep memory is another instance of the anachronistic projections of the media culture of the Enlightenment back into antiquity.

Nevertheless, it is certain that some ancient writers used written sources in their compositions. How are we to imagine the writing process in antiquity? Did ancient authors memorize their written sources and recompose them as they wrote their own new works on their laps? Furthermore, if ancient writings were published by performances, what was the role of manuscripts in the performances of ancient works? While it may have been physically possible to hold and turn the two posts of a small scroll in two hands, it required some physical agility. There are intimations of tables in ancient synagogues as may be the picture in Luke's mind in the story of Jesus reading the Isaiah scroll, a huge scroll, in the Nazareth synagogue. But many of the stories of ancient readings such as Lucians' description of Herodotus' reading of his *Histories* at the Olympics exclude the possibility of a table for the scroll. We must, therefore, imagine a much larger role for memory as in modern chamber performances of operas or the performance of oratorios.

All of the evidence leads back to the central and ever-present role of memory in the composition and performance of ancient manuscripts. The clarification of the relationship of memory and manuscript in ancient literature is of major importance for biblical scholarship because the picture of redactors copying and revising written sources for their readers has had a pervasive and determinative impact on the exegesis and interpretation of biblical books, as is evident in all of the critical commentaries on the Gospels and in our modes of performance of the Bible in churches and classrooms. Source criticism and the silent study of texts based on this traditional picture continue to be the methodological mainstays of biblical criticism. If, however, the traditional picture is historically improbable, how are we to conceive the transmission of sources, the techniques of composition, and the experience of audiences in the biblical tradition? Therefore, the task of this group, the reassessment of the role of memory in the biblical tradition, is of pervasive importance for the future of biblical interpretation.

The two classical methods for investigating such questions are deductive and inductive: draw the big picture of the ancient world as a way of shedding light on specific biblical traditions or examine specific traditions as the basis for building a broader picture. In this paper, I will adopt an inductive approach working out from the mnemonic structures of Mark's passion and resurrection narrative to the broader picture of the Synoptic tradition. A further word about methodology - I am convinced that the only possible way of identifying the mnemonic structures of the biblical tradition is to learn and perform these works as an integral dimension of scholarly methodology. I remember vividly the day in 1968 when, after several months of studying the commentaries on Mark's passion-resurrection narrative and being in despair because of the highly speculative character of source and tradition history criticism, I decided to put the books away and to learn Mark's narrative by heart in Greek and to begin to tell the story. This paper is a direct result of that research.

I. The announcement and fulfillment of prophecies

The most prevalent mnemonic structure in Mark's passion/resurrection narrative is the announcement and fulfillment of predictions or prophecies. These prophecies and their fulfillment constitute a summary or list of the episodic structure of the story that is then completed in the subsequent events. The stories of the events are often, though not always, linked to the prophecies by the repetition of the exact words of the prophecy.

The most important prophecy for the mnemonics of the passion narrative is the third passion prophecy (Mark 10.33-34). Each major event of the passion narrative—the arrest, the Sanhedrin trial, the Pilate trial, the mocking by the soldiers, the crucifixion, and the resurrection—is listed in the third passion prophecy. The passion narrative has the same episodic structure as the final passion prophecy. The words of the prophecy function as memory hooks for remembering the episodes of the passion narrative. The exact words from the prophecy are used at the beginning of the story in four of the six episodes. In remembering a story, if you can recall the first word or phrase of the episode, the rest will follow. While the exact word is the best clue, a synonym also provides the link to the structures of long-term memory. Thus, “crucify” as a synonym for “kill” has the same mnemonic function as the exact word would have.

Furthermore, in addition to the structural links to the third passion prophecy, Jesus' statement at the end of the Gethsemane story—“the Son of Man is handed over into the hands of sinners”—is a repetition of a phrase from the second passion prophecy (9.31-32). This verbal link to the second passion prophecy introduces the climactic series of fulfillments of the third prophecy beginning with the betrayal/arrest story that immediately follows. This is an example of another pattern of mnemonic connections. The verbal linkages occur most frequently at the beginnings of episodes of the story. But they also often occur at the ends of episodes. The links to earlier words are also a clue to what is to follow, in this case, the betrayal.

Of course, this prophecy is also the climax of the passion prophecy sequence that provides a mnemonic structure for the section of the story from the messianic confession of Peter through the third passion prophecy (8.27-10.34). This web of mnemonic linkages is woven throughout the whole Gospel and is one of the internal signs that the Gospel was composed to be told as a whole rather than in short pericopes.

A similar mnemonic structure is introduced by the prophecy of scandalization, denial, and going ahead to Galilee after the resurrection. In Mark's story this prophecy immediately follows the last supper and provides the memory hook to the only major episode of the passion narrative, Peter's denial, that is not listed in the third passion prophecy. This prophecy also establishes the sequence of disciple response to the early events of the passion: Jesus' betrayal/disciples' flight, Jesus' trial and condemnation to death/Peter's denial. The forecast of the post-resurrection going before them to Galilee is another line of mnemonic connection to the young man's announcement in the empty tomb. It is also interesting that Peter's prophecy that he won't run away is also thematically, if not verbally, linked to his following Jesus to the high priest's house. Jesus' prophecies here are fulfilled in word as well as deed.

A third motif of prophecy and fulfillment is woven around Judas' betrayal. The motif of Judas' betrayal provides the threads of mnemonic connection for the first section of the passion narrative (14.1-25) prior to the prophecy of scandalization and denial. An interesting dimension of this motif is that the prophecy of betrayal by one of the twelve at the last supper follows Judas' initial action of betrayal after Jesus' sharp critique of those who rebuked the woman with expensive ointment. For the audience, this means that Jesus' prophecy has already been at least partially fulfilled. Because of the earlier story of Judas going to the chief priests, the audience knows both that the betrayal is happening and who is doing it. This motif in the passion/resurrection narrative is also linked to the earlier story of the appointing of the twelve (3.19). This notice early in the story is a preparation of the audience by the storyteller for the shocking story of betrayal that will follow later.

This web of mnemonic links is in some ways the most dense and complex in the passion/resurrection story. The betrayal/handing over of the Son of Man to the chief priests is predicted in the second and third passion prophecies midway in the Gospel story. But, while Judas' betrayal is foreshadowed in the story of the appointment of the twelve (3.19), the actual prophecy of betrayal by one of the twelve takes place in the passion story itself during the last supper. These linkages all come together in the story of the betrayal and arrest of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. But the story thread of Judas' betrayal also provides a mnemonic connection with the story of the events of the day before the feast (14.1-11) and the first day of the feast with its climactic Passover meal (14.12-25). Thus, all of the stories of the passion narrative are linked into the mnemonic structure of prophecy and fulfillment except the anointing at Bethany, the preparations for the Passover and the burial.

II. Mnemonic threads linked to earlier stories

Another set of mnemonic connections links the stories of the passion-resurrection with earlier, non-prophetic stories in the Gospel. These connections function as memory hooks for the storyteller and as the basis of memory and inference by the audience.

The first of these linkages in the passion-resurrection story is the plot of the priests and the scribes. The primary links of this mnemonic structure are between the cleansing of the Temple and the parable of the wicked tenants with the beginning of the passion story. The verbal connection with the plot to destroy him extends back to the plot after the healing of the man with a withered hand and after the cleansing of the Temple. This is also linked with the authorities' fear of the crowd. This motif has its climax in the meeting of the authorities before they hand Jesus over to Pilate. Once again as with the passion prophecies, the memory hooks occur at the major beginnings of the story, the passion story itself (14.1-2) and the Pilate trial (15.1). For the audience, this memory connection also makes possible the inference at the beginning of the passion narrative that the chief priests and scribes have escalated the steps they are willing to take to kill him from looking for a way to destroy him after the Temple cleansing to resorting to treachery and conspiracy against Jesus on their last day of opportunity, Wednesday, since they have ruled out any arrest during the feast because of their fear of a riot by the people.

The second major linkage is the connection between the two feedings earlier in the Gospel and the last supper. This is an interesting example of the multiple functions of memory in the telling and hearing of the story. While this verbal thread/gesture connection is of relatively minor importance as a memory linkage for the storyteller, it is of major importance for the audience because it enables them to make the inference about the meaning of the loaves in the earlier feeding stories. The verbal connections between the two feedings and the last supper facilitate remembering the ritual action of taking the bread, giving thanks, breaking it and giving it to the disciples. It is a memory hook to this one episode and, while helpful for the storyteller, is of relatively minor mnemonic importance. But for the audience this formula links this story of the last supper with the memories of the two earlier feeding stories and the mystery of the significance of the loaves that is developed in the stories of the disciples' incomprehension.

The first of these is the storyteller's enigmatic explanation of the disciples' fear and amazement at seeing Jesus walking on the water: "For they didn't understand about the loaves because their hearts were hardened.(6.52)" This motif of incomprehension of the loaves significance is heightened in Jesus' dialogue with the disciples in the boat when they are worried that they have no bread (8.14-21). In the telling of the story this speech is addressed to the audience as the disciples and the concluding question—"Don't you understand?"—is left unanswered. The question hangs in the air for the rest of the story: what is the significance of the multiplication of the loaves? The repetition of the ritual action at the supper evokes the memory of the feedings and of this question. As a result, Jesus' statement—"This is my body"—answers the remembered question from earlier in the story. The multiplication of the loaves is connected with the multiplication of Jesus'

body in the eucharistic celebrations of the community. The perception of this dimension of the meaning of the loaves and the completion of this major motif in the overall story's plot is dependent on the audience's memory of this earlier question and these earlier stories.

Another dimension of the mnemonic structures of the story is implicit in the testimony of the witnesses at the trial before the Sanhedrin. The storyteller has already characterized the testimony of the witnesses as false before reporting their testimony. Their testimony takes two phrases from earlier statements of Jesus—a prophecy that the stones will be thrown down and that he will be raised on the third day—and distorts them into a statement of treason. The same verb is used in both statements about the destruction of the Temple and the three days linkage is unmistakable. But these memories make it possible for the audience to identify that the witnesses are distorting Jesus' earlier statements. This memory connection to Jesus' Temple prophecy goes unrecognized by many listeners now because the two instances of the verb are translated as "thrown down" and "destroy" rather than preserving the repetition of the same word in Greek with the same word in English. But for Mark's audience the witnesses' statement evokes the memory of Jesus' earlier statements and enables them to confirm the storyteller's characterization of the testimony of the witnesses as false. The storyteller implicitly appeals to the audience's memory of the earlier stories for the recognition of the witnesses' perjury.

III. Internal mnemonic structures linking sections of the passion-resurrection story

In addition to these mnemonic structures that link the Markan passion-resurrection story to earlier stories and sayings in the Gospel, there are also a series of mnemonic connections **within** the passion-resurrection story.

Jesus' three prayers at Gethsemane are linked together by verbal connections that facilitate remembering the story. In this story, the memory hooks for the episodes of Jesus' prayer and the disciples' sleeping make the story easy to remember. The first episode introduces the two verbal linkages: "while I pray" at the beginning and "stay awake" at the end. Jesus' prayer in the second episode is introduced by the key word, "pray." The verbal thread of "sleeping" and "staying awake" provides the memory hook at the beginning of the three episodes of the disciples' sleeping. Once the memory structure of the story is recognized, it is easy to remember.

The death, burial, and empty tomb stories are linked together by the memory of the names of the women. This mnemonic thread occurs as the final sentence in the episodes of the death and the burial and as the first sentence in the story of the empty tomb.

The major episodes of the resurrection story are linked together by the mnemonic connections between going out to the tomb, going into the tomb, and going out from the tomb.

As with the other mnemonic connections in the story, these two linkages have a dual function of providing memory connections for the storyteller and of auditory links that enable the audience to make immediate connections with what is happening. Recognizing these structures gives us insight into how storytellers think about the composition of their stories.

IV. Time markers as a mnemonic device

Another structural component of the mnemonic structures of Mark's passion-resurrection story is the time markers that introduce each new section of the story. These markers enable the storyteller to remember the story by linking together the successive days of the week. These markers almost always occur as the first words of the story of each new day. The only exception to this pattern is the beginning of the resurrection story where there are time markers at the beginning of the first two sentences of the story. The first words of a story are the most important words in remembering a story. Once the first words of an episode are retrieved from long-term memory, the rest follows with relative ease.

For the audience this mnemonic structure is connected with the prophecy that Jesus will be raised on the third day. The three time markers at the beginning of the burial and resurrection stories enable the audience to count the three days and to anticipate the fulfillment of the prophecy.

V. Other memory hooks

These are then the major mnemonic structures of Mark's passion-resurrection story. There are other structural links within the story. The crucifixion story has a series of verbal threads that function as mnemonic linkages. Thus, the notice of the 3rd, 6th, and 9th hours, the repetition of the charges at the trials, "King of the Jews" and "tear down the Temple and build it up in three days," and the two loud cries provide verbal linkages in the episodes that lead up to Jesus' death. The fivefold repetition of the key word, "to crucify," (15.15, 20, 24, 25, 27) is the climactic last verb in both the Pilate trial and the mocking by the soldiers and the linking word in three of the four sentences of the crucifixion episode.

Place markers also are used at the beginning of stories and function as another set of memory hooks along with the time markers. Thus, the naming of the Mt. of Olives (14.26), Gethsemane (14.32), the high priest's place (14.53, 54), Golgotha (15.22), and the tomb (16.2) provide settings for the stories that enable both the storyteller and the audience to place the following story in imagined space.

Also there are several instances of "ring" composition in the passion-resurrection story as Joanna Dewey has identified earlier in Mark. Thus, the anointing at Bethany is introduced and followed by the story of plot against Jesus by the chief priests and Peter's following and then denying Jesus frames the trial before the Sanhedrin. All of these elements of the story function as mnemonic linkages for the storyteller/readers and audiences of the passion-resurrection story.

VI. Implications

To summarize the data, Mark's passion-resurrection story has a dense and multi-faceted mnemonic structure. The motifs of prophecy/fulfillment link the story to earlier stories in the Gospel and to other stories in the passion-resurrection story. There are also verbal threads that function as memory hooks to motifs earlier in the Gospel such as the feeding stories as well as to motifs in the passion-resurrection story. Markers of time and place in the introductions and conclusions of the episodes of the story also provide important mnemonic links within the story.

What then are the implications of this pervasive attention to facilitating memory in Mark's climactic story?

As can now be seen, there are mnemonic structures built into every story of Mark's passion/resurrection narrative. The sheer density of the mnemonic connections within the overall story is striking. We can infer from the pervasiveness of the memory linkages that the composer of this story was thinking at every moment about ways to make the story easy to remember.

These mnemonic structures function at two levels in the performance of the story. First of all, they provide the teller of the story with connections that make it possible to remember the story. In addition, these mnemonic structures enable the audience to remember what has happened earlier in the story and to make a whole series of inferences about the meaning of new episodes in the story as they occur. Thus, the mnemonic structures of the story function in different but related ways for the performer and the audience.

What are the implications of the structures of memory in Mark's passion/resurrection story for the history of the Markan and the Synoptic tradition? First of all, the mnemonic structures of Mark's passion/resurrection story are denser and more tightly interwoven than in any other section of Mark's Gospel. But this story is indicative of the character of all three Gospels. While the precise features of the mnemonic structures in the other three Gospels remain to be identified by future research, my own investigations indicate that similar structures are present in Matthew, Luke, and John as well. The implication of the pervasiveness of these mnemonic structures is that the four Gospels were composed for memorized performance rather than for either silent or vocalized reading by individual readers.

What about the reader in Mark 13.8 since the statement "let the reader understand" is most naturally taken by modern readers as an authorial inside comment to them? The reader was the performer, the one who was reciting the manuscript from memory, perhaps with a copy of the manuscript before him in the manner of modern cantors. The comment was probably an instruction by the author to the performer about the tone that was to be used in reporting the abomination of desolation. It is a comment in the tradition of the annotations and trope marks in ancient Greek, Latin, and Hebrew manuscripts indicating the ways in which the work is to be performed. The instruction would have been for the reader to understand and to communicate to the audience by tone and gesture

that this allusion to the book of Daniel is a reference to a contemporary event, either the destruction of the Temple or, more likely, the desecration of the Temple by the Zealots who occupied the Temple near the beginning of the revolt (winter of 67-68 C.E.), as Joel Markus argues (890-91), or the desecration caused by Titus who entered the Temple (70 C.E.) when it was already in flames and viewed the holy of holies which was permitted only for the high priest. My hunch is that “the abomination of desolation standing where he should not be” is more likely a reference to Titus than to Eleazar, son of Simon, or Phanas, the Zealot appointee to the office of high priest.

Second, if the copying of multiple manuscripts by ancient editors is historically improbable, how are we to account for the degree of word for word identity that exists between the three Synoptic Gospels? It is improbable that the extensive word for word identity of Matthew, Mark, and Luke was the result of exclusively oral tradition processes. While Ruth Ferguson has identified instances of oral transmission with a high degree of word for word identity, it is not typical of oral tradition, as the Lord and Parry school has shown. The hypothesis that emerges from this research is that Mark or Matthew composed their manuscripts for memorization and that the composers of the later Gospels in the Synoptic tradition composed their stories from manuscripts that they had memorized.

Thus, if we assume the two-document hypothesis as a solution to the Synoptic problem, it is more likely that Matthew and Luke memorized and recomposed manuscripts of Mark and Q than that they copied them from manuscripts on historically improbable tables. This would have been typical of ancient composition processes as well as ongoing practices in the composition of music to the present. As scholarship of the Greco-Roman world has long recognized, the memorization of manuscripts was a structural component of ancient education. Students in the schools of classical Greece and Rome memorized and recited every day. This was equally true of Jewish educational systems. This daily process involved the word-for-word memorization of manuscripts. The most widespread text for memorization in the Greek educational system was Homer. As David Carr has argued in his recent book, learning Homer in school served as the basis for participation in ritual recitals by the elite members of Greek society. However, the primary function of the years of memory training was to provide a body of deeply internalized content that could then be recomposed spontaneously in various rhetorical performances. That is, a central feature of public speech in antiquity involved the recomposition of previously memorized material. This is a more probable account of the Gospel tradition than our traditional account derived from the editorial practices of later stages in the literate cultures of western civilization.

Thus, I would propose that, when seen in the context of ancient systems of communication technology and education, the pervasive presence of mnemonic systems in the Synoptic Gospels and the degree of verbal identity between them is best explained by the process of the memorization and recomposition of manuscripts by composers rather than the copying and editing of written sources by editors. Both the Synoptic problem and the question of Johannine sources are more appropriately addressed by the hypothesis of manuscripts that were memorized and recomposed rather than the

assumption that they were copied by editors of close at hand manuscripts. This hypothesis also carries the implication that all three of the Synoptic Gospels were composed for memorized performance by storyteller/readers.

Third, why compose manuscripts of the stories of and about Jesus rather than simply pass on the stories orally? As with composers of music and drama in the modern world, the primary function of manuscript composition in the ancient world was to facilitate performance. Each of the Gospels made possible distinctive performances of the Jesus tradition by persons who would memorize and tell the stories of a particular Gospel. The composition of the manuscripts created the possibility of widespread performances of the stories of Jesus that were linked in each case to the oral traditions of the apostles. In contrast to Lord and Parry's description of the writing and memorization of the poems leading to the decline of the Serbo-Croatian storytelling tradition, the performance of written manuscripts in the Greco-Roman world was associated with cultural energy and the growth of new types and processes of literature. The Gospels were an integral part of that wider cultural development.

Finally, what about Mark's sources for the passion/resurrection story? Had Mark memorized a manuscript or manuscripts of the events surrounding Jesus' death or did he have only oral sources that he was transforming into written tradition? Was Mark the source of the transmediatization of the Gospel tradition into writing? Many Markan scholars have advocated the hypothesis of a pre-Markan passion narrative, either a lost manuscript (Martin Kohler) or the Gospel of Peter (John Dominic Crossan) while Werner Kelber has advocated that Mark was the source of the transmediatization of the Gospel tradition from the oral to the written Gospel. A common element in the various forms of the pre-Markan passion narrative hypothesis is that this pre-Markan manuscript consisted of only a passion narrative rather than an abbreviated or partial form of the whole Gospel. If this were the case, the probability is that the final form of the story including its mnemonic structures would be internally structured. That is, the formative shaping of the story and its mnemonic structure would have been determined by the original shorter story.

However, as we have seen, the most important element of the mnemonic structure of the passion story is the listing of the episodes in the third passion prophecy. This structure includes the frequent repetition of the exact words of the prophecy in the introductions of the episodes of the passion. Furthermore, the meaning of many elements of the Gospel's climactic story is directly connected to the evocation of the audience's memory of earlier parts of the story: e.g., the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies, the significance of the loaves, the perjury of the witnesses at the Sanhedrin trial. These are all signs that the detailed connections between the passion/resurrection story and the earlier stories of the Gospel were probably elements of the original composition. The passion story is a composition of sound that is intricately woven together with the whole preceding story. The linkages of the passion narrative are structurally connected with the rest of the story rather than in an internal unity. This feature of the story would be more consistent with a composition that was initially shaped as a whole rather than as an original passion narrative with a later extended introduction. Thus, the mnemonic structures of the Markan passion-

resurrection story point to pre-Markan oral sources that were recomposed in the whole manuscript. Thus, while I do not agree with Kelber's account of the anti-disciple and anti-oral Gospel motive for the composition of Mark, the detailed study of the mnemonic structures of the Gospel support Kelber's description of Mark's role in the Synoptic tradition.

In summary, an investigation of the mnemonic structures of Mark's passion-resurrection story reveals an intricately woven matrix of episodic and syntactical connections that were designed to make possible memorized performances of the story. The density of these memory connections raises major questions about earlier assumptions of the processes of composition and transmission of the Synoptic gospels. This data invites us to reconsider our conceptions of the Synoptic tradition. It also leaves unanswered a whole series of questions about the specific mnemonic structures in the stories and speeches of all four Gospels, the performance of the Gospels in their original historical context, and the relationship of memory and manuscript in the Gospel tradition. A new generation of scholars is needed who will study and interpret the Gospel tradition utilizing a research methodology grounded in learning and performing biblical compositions by heart.