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A New Quest for the *Sitz im Leben*: Social Memory, the Jesus Tradition and the Gospel of Matthew*

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The recent interest in social memory theories among NT scholars promises a new framework for the study of the social dynamics reflected in the Gospels. This essay employs Eviatar Zerubavel's 'sociomental typography' of the 'sociobiographical memory' in order to conceptualize the contours of the *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospel of Matthew. The perspective of social memory as described by Zerubavel reveals the mnemonic character of the *Sitz im Leben* and discloses how those participating in it related to and used the Gospel of Mark, identified with the scribal traits of the Matthean disciples, cherished Peter, and situated themselves in history.

NT scholars have recently introduced the notion of social or collective memory as a conceptual framework for understanding the development of the Jesus tradition. James Dunn, for instance, endorses 'the theory of "social memory" and "cultural memory," associated with the names of Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann'.[1] What is of significance to Dunn is that memory makes the subject matter of the past serviceable to the image that the community wishes to promote of itself.

This relationship between memory and the self-promoted image of the community turns the issue of social memory into one that concerns the idea of the *Sitz im Leben*. The Gospel of Matthew presents a particularly interesting case. Its narrative is strongly systematized and indicates specific circumstances and intentionality of tradition and composition. In the debate about its social ramifications, one pays attention to ethnic, religious and political aspects of

* This is an extended version of a short main paper presented at the SNTS conference in Halle, Germany, 2–6 August 2005.

1 J. D. G. Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 43–4. Dunn himself makes no use of social memory theory. But cf. J. Schröter, *Erinnerung an Jesu Worte: Studien zur Rezeption der Logienüberlieferung in Markus, Q und Thomas* (WMANT 76; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997) 462–6.

interaction.[2] An equally crucial issue is its 'mnemonic interaction', that is, the question of what it implies that the author told the story about Jesus another time. He already had a coherent narrative at his disposal that was of fundamental importance to him.[3] Yet he evidently made the past as presented in Mark's Gospel serviceable to the image he wished to promote and recreated and performed it again, in a new textualized narrative.

Social memory approaches are frequently being used in the humanities and social sciences. By contrast, despite the intriguing comments by Dunn and others, they have rarely been employed in the scientific work with the Jesus tradition and the Gospels. The scholars who advocate a social memory approach to the Jesus tradition fail to pursue it consistently and mostly refer only to the flexible phenomenon of oral performance. Those interested in reconstructing the identities of the Gospel communities make no distinction between subgroups within the community and the social setting of authorship and the intended audience. They insist on the redaction-critical modes of historical reconstruction and read the Gospels as one-dimensional and direct imprints of social realities.[4] The sociological study of the Jesus tradition and the Gospels has been amazingly uncritical of its form- and redaction-critical basis and allegorizing tendencies.

Social memory has only very recently been employed more extensively in the study of the Jesus tradition and the Gospels. The editors of the new, multi-authored volume *Memory, Tradition, and Text* rightly recognize that 'social memory theory presents a number of far-reaching implications for the study of the Gospel traditions, the composition history of the Gospels, and the quest for the historical Jesus'.[5] If we acknowledge its importance, it becomes essential to look more closely into the dynamics involved as the early Christians struggled to

2 Cf. recently J. Riches and D. C. Sim, eds., *The Gospel of Matthew in Its Roman Imperial Context* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005).

3 U. Luz shows that the Markan narrative was fundamental to the author of Matthew's Gospel. See, e.g., *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Mt 1–7)* (EKK 1/1; Zürich: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 3rd ed., 1992) 24–6, 56–9.

4 See the challenge to the idea that the Gospels are addressed to specific local communities in R. Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audience* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Of importance is the warning against fusing the two questions of the local context *in* which a Gospel was composed and the audience *for* which it was written. For a survey of the debate, see E. W. Klink, 'The Gospel Community Debate: State of the Question', *CBR* 3 (2004) 60–85. M. M. Mitchell's discussion is now published; see 'Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim that "The Gospels Were Written for All Christians"', *NTS* 51 (2005) 36–79. – I regret using the label 'Matthean community' somewhat carelessly in *Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority and Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism and the Matthean Community* (ConBNT 24; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994).

5 A. Kirk and T. Thatcher, 'Jesus Tradition as Social Memory', *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (ed. A. Kirk and T. Thatcher; SBLSS 52; Atlanta: SBL, 2005) 25–42 (39).

find their identity in relation to the history which they cherished and performed. Social memory is intrinsically linked to questions of belonging and challenges scholars to seek for a clearer conception as to how each Gospel narrative reflects the interaction with the social construction of the past. Possibly a fruitful avenue forward is to focus on those mnemonic aspects of narration which indicate how each new narrative – in this case the Gospel of Matthew – situated itself in relation to the past. The social memory approach may provide a 'memory-critical' repertoire which opens up a new framework for studying the social dynamics reflected in the Gospel narrative.

I. The Social Memory – An Approach

I have previously worked with oral history and the role of memory in eyewitness accounts.[6] This was a 'socialist' perspective on history, not merely a naïve search for innocent eyewitnesses, assuming that the past is available through socially conditioned stories concerning the past. The study of social memory extends this in that it focuses specifically on the mnemonic dimension of the stories. Paul Thompson, a leading expert on oral history, acknowledges Halbwachs' argument that individual recollections operate within the framework of a collective memory and only warns against the idea that they are entirely determined by it.[7] Also sociologists have become interested in constructing a sociology of the past.[8] Recollection is to be measured in terms of its relevance for the present situation as well as its connection to the past. The perspective of social memory complements oral history in helping to conceptualize this negotiation between past and present in the present.[9]

There is a confusing variety of terminology. The literature uses 'family memory', 'local memory', 'popular memory', 'public memory', 'relational

6 S. Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History* (WUNT 123; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000; Boston: Brill, 2003). I have developed this in e.g. 'History or Story in Acts – A Middle Way? The "We" Passages, Historical Intertexture, and Oral History', *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (ed. T. Penner and C. Vander Stichele; SBLSymS 20; Atlanta: SBL, 2003) 257–83.

7 P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd ed. 2000) 132–3. Dunn strangely dismisses oral history while acknowledging the social memory approach (*A New Perspective*, 43).

8 The pioneering work in the field of sociology was E. Shils, *Tradition* (London: Faber, 1981). For surveys of research into social memory, see J. K. Olick and J. Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices', *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998) 105–40; B. A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003).

9 Cf. Misztal's chapter entitled 'The Dynamics of Memory Approach: Memory as a Process of Negotiation', which presents an approach that differs from those that emphasize the invention of tradition and the confrontation of dominant ideology (*Theories*, 67–74).

memory', 'cultural memory', etc. These expressions sometimes carry different connotations, but are also often employed synonymously. In response to critics of his earlier work, Halbwachs clarified that he distinguished among autobiographical memory, historical memory (the past to which we have no 'organic' relation), and collective memory (the past forming our realities) and pointed out that individuals remember as members of groups,[10] but he made no further distinction in his use of the label 'collective memory'.

With James Fentress and Chris Wickham, I will use 'social memory' as a label distinct from 'collective memory'.[11] While the latter is social in that it includes those recollections of a group that are shared by all of its members, being something else than the sum total of all the individual recollections, the former is social in that it deals with the social aspects of the mental act of remembering. Social memory is thus interested in the memory of individuals in social contexts which are larger than the individual and yet related to the individual.

The study of social memory has been described as a non-paradigmatic, transdisciplinary, centerless enterprise.[12] There is no single theory of social memory. Only rarely do experts in the field present broader structures of social remembering.[13] A notable exception is the cognitive sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel, who wishes to decontextualize his findings and develop a transcultural and transhistorical perspective on social memory as a generic phenomenon. He has elaborated what he calls a 'sociomental typography' of the 'sociobiographical memory',[14] working with various mnemonic entities that have social implications. The vital component is the 'mnemonic community'. Such a community, he argues, maintains 'mnemonic traditions' and teaches new generations what to remember and forget through 'mnemonic socialization', the monitoring of 'mnemonic others' and the fighting of 'mnemonic battles'. The language – oral

10 *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950) 35–40. This work was published posthumously by J. Alexandre (born Halbwachs) on the basis of manuscripts found among Halbwachs' papers. His major study in the field of collective memory was *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, new ed., 1952). It first appeared in 1925. – NT scholars often use Halbwachs' presentist approach uncritically. It is noteworthy that in *Memory, Tradition, and Text*, B. Schwartz, who is a sociologist and leading expert on social memory, stands out from the other authors, who are NT scholars, with his harsh criticism of Halbwachs' 'pejorative conception of collective memory' ('Christian Origins: Historical Truth and Social Memory', *Memory, Tradition, and Text*, 43–56 [49]).

11 J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) ix.

12 Olick and Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies', 105–6.

13 The often cited and helpful book by Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, discusses only various separate components of social memory.

14 E. Zerubavel, 'Social Memories: Steps to a Sociology of the Past', *Qualitative Sociology* 19 (1996) 283–99; idem, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003).

and written – makes possible certain social 'sites of memory' and allows memory to pass from one person to another, providing for the 'mnemonic transitivity' in terms of transmitted traditions. In this way the mnemonic community integrates different personal pasts into a single common past that all members come to remember collectively – the collective memory. Such 'mnemonic synchronization' takes place in regular joint acts of remembrance.

According to Zerubavel, remembering comes into view as a control system. Being socialized into the community means to be taught socially what to remember and what to forget and to be given the plot structures according to which the past is narrated. Remembering is regulated by social rules of remembrance. On another level, he claims, we identify ourselves with the enduring memories of our communities to the extent that we develop the ability to experience events that happened to communities to which we belong before we joined them as if they were part of our own past. When communal boundaries become coextensive with shared memories, we feel pride or shame in past events that happened after or before we were socialized into the community.

II. Social Memory and the *Sitz im Leben*

The early Christian groups can be seen as emerging mnemonic communities that negotiated their sense of belonging in relation to the larger mnemonic environment of the Jewish people. There was a mnemonic battle over what to remember and what to forget.[15] In this process, the social memory was an effective means of control and identity formation.

The *Sitz im Leben* was that recurrent type of occasion within the life of these mnemonic communities when certain people cared about the Jesus tradition in a special way and performed and narrated it orally and in writing.[16] It was a kind of recollection within the specific context of influencing the present by reference to the past. Despite differences from the situations discussed by Zerubavel, a number of significant points of comparison emerge from his typography.

(i) *Orality and Textuality*

Zerubavel's typography integrates oral forms of communication into the presence of writing. Social memory is not dependent only on oral modes of interaction. He writes of mnemonic transitivity in terms of the possibility of passing on memories from one person to another even when there is no direct contact

15 J. M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 62–97.

16 I will evaluate the main uses of the expression *Sitz im Leben* and defend this definition in a forthcoming article.

between them. Social memory can be stored in diverse sites of memory – even in ruins, portraits, statues, coins, etc. The decisive site is language, expressed orally or in writing.

In early form criticism the notion of the *Sitz im Leben* depended on the romantic idea of a folkloristic kind of orality. With the emergence of redaction criticism and the so-called 'third' *Sitz im Leben*, it became more literary. Social memory relates to various kinds of oralities and interaction with writing. Instead of speaking of the Jesus tradition simply as oral, the notion of mnemonic transitivity introduces sensitivity to different types of transmission depending on the interaction between different sites of memory.[17]

(ii) *The Typical and the Specific Situation*

The typical situation shaping the social memory of the past is the regular co-existence within the group. The tradition of the past takes form through constant interaction within the mnemonic community. There exist also specific occasions when people remember together. Commemorative anniversaries and festivals are such recurrent occasions which manifest themselves on a broad national scale or in smaller groups. They make evident a process of mnemonic synchronization, focusing at one specific juncture the attention of the entire mnemonic community on the same moment in history.

The *Sitz im Leben* of the Jesus tradition and the Gospels synchronized the social memory of the past at particular mnemonic occasions of the entire mnemonic community. The teaching of converts, the Baptism, the Lord's Supper and other performative events served as mimetic occasions of 'co-remembering'. The *Sitz im Leben* is an 'in-group' category nourished by regular co-existence and relating to the wider community of believers. It is less evident how activities aimed at outsiders, who were not socialized into the same mnemonic community, could have this social function. The sermons in the book of Acts and the Markan narrative indicate perhaps that the internal occasions of 'co-remembering' were kerygmatically transformed and related to a broader audience.[18]

(iii) *Social and Collective*

The social perspective on memory makes, as we have seen, a distinction between what is social and what is collective. The collective memory is indeed

17 The view that orality–literacy studies are of little relevance to historical understanding (B. J. Malina *et al.*) reveals our own ethnocentric presuppositions. See P. J. J. Botha, 'Cognition, Orality-Literacy, and Approaches to First-Century Writings', *Orality, Literacy, and Colonialism in Antiquity* (ed. J. A. Draper; SBLSS 52; Atlanta: SBL, 2004) 37–63.

18 Transmission and kerygmatic performance are often regarded as two mutually exclusive alternatives for the tradition process. I have tried to combine both perspectives in 'The Transmission of the Jesus Tradition', *The Handbook of the Study of the Historical Jesus* (4 vols; ed. T. Holmén and S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

social, but it focuses not on the remembering act but on that which is mnemonically shared by all members. Social memory, in the narrow sense of the expression, is that part of the mental act of remembering which is socially conditioned. The collective memory is of importance for the construction of social memory, but not identical with it.

It is customary to claim that the *Sitz im Leben* was a collective occasion. What individuals recalled is regarded as insignificant in comparison to the joint memory and performance of the community. This view neglects the importance of eyewitness testimony.[19] The study of social memory opens up a possibility to work with the collective force of the *Sitz im Leben* without rendering the individual a sort of 'automaton' who passively obeys the interiorized collective will.[20]

(iv) *Narrative Structures and Generic Forms*

The social memory learns to remember and narrate the past according to conventional plot structures and mnemonic patterns. It narrativizes history and gives social meaning to it by positioning past events in relation to each other. The socialization into the mnemonic community provides patterns that help each individual mentally to string such events into coherent, culturally meaningful narratives.

A crucial issue in the debate about the *Sitz im Leben* is how to move from an observation in the available writing to the social realities behind it. Instead of distinguishing between words and deeds as entities of tradition and thinking of the shaping of separate forms as tendencies of the group's activities, the social investigation of memory looks for larger narrative structures according to which one patterned the past and maintained a sense of historical continuity. The historical Jesus is not the sum total of what the Christian groups transmitted as items of tradition. The scholarly enterprise of reconstructing Jesus by isolating specific traditional units bypasses the reconfigurative element of the traditioning and compositional process.[21] It is indeed a feasible endeavor which provides important fragments of historical knowledge, but it works with a different agenda and

19 I have criticized this notion in my review of R. Bultmann's *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (1963), *JBL* 122 (2003) 549–55; and 'A New Perspective on the Jesus Tradition: Reflections on James D.G. Dunn's *Jesus Remembered*', *JSNT* 26 (2004) 459–71.

20 This is also how Fentress and Wickham express their critique of Emile Durkheim's and Halbwachs' excessive emphasis on the collective nature of social consciousness (*Social Memory*, ix). Zerubavel is unclear on this point, but recognizes that we each have our own 'autobiographical memories' and stresses the importance of distinguishing between personalized manifestations of a mnemonic community's collective memory and the 'truly personal recollections' ('Social Memories', 284, 294).

21 See further S. Byrskog, 'The Historicity of Jesus: How Do We Know that Jesus Existed?', *The Handbook of the Study of the Historical Jesus* (4 vols; ed. T. Holmén and S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

captures only partly the process of traditioning and Gospel composition. From the perspective of social memory, the Jesus of history emerges through a process that transmitted tradition *and* reconfigured him narratively on the basis of conventional plot structures and shared mnemonic patterns.

(v) ***Memory and Identity***

The recollective memory may reflect past experiences *and* have an orientational function in the present. A significant part of identity formation has to do with mnemonic identification and narrativity. Identities are projects and practices, not properties, and emerge from the ways we are positioned by and position ourselves in the narratives of the past. Remembering becomes part of the ever ongoing search for belonging. To be part of a community means to situate oneself in relation to its past, be that a story about Jesus or other mnemonic narratives, and negotiate one's own mnemonic identity in relation to the history of that group.

The *Sitz im Leben*, as we noted, is a recurrent type of occasion within a community when certain people care about the Jesus tradition and use it orally and in writing the Gospels. The social dimension of memory highlights that the people involved in that particular group and these kinds of activities remembered as social beings who shared in the construction of identity. Instead of seeking for their identity by focusing on textual form and redaction, the social memory approach pays attention to the identification with and distance to the past reflected in the mnemonic structures of the narratives which they produced.

III. Social Memory and the Gospel of Matthew

These five points extracted mostly from Zerubabel's sociomental typography provide important guides to how the Gospel of Matthew might have situated itself in relation to the past from the perspective of social memory and may serve as conceptual frameworks for identifying the mnemonic identity of its *Sitz im Leben*. I stress that we deal with the immediate context of the Gospel. The *Sitz im Leben* is socially part of what happens in the larger community, but not identical with it. In order to avoid the excessive allegorization of the Gospel narrative that characterizes several attempts to determine the identity of its setting, it is necessary to distinguish between its broader and its immediate context. The Gospel reflects a moment of intelligent biographical narrativization of the Jesus tradition. As such, its narrative gives information concerning that moment and those within the community that cared specifically about the Jesus tradition and the making of the Gospel. We know they wished to tell a story about Jesus and somehow made him the central figure of their self-image. We are less certain about the broader circumstances of the community at large and the intended audience. The Gospel, for all we know, could reflect ideologies and practices of a local community or be

in conflict with them. It was perhaps performed within the local community of its author, but it is difficult to know if it was addressing its specific problems or aiming for a wider reading/hearing. It is a *bios*, not a letter.[22] The *Sitz im Leben* of its tradition and composition is thus the primary mnemonic occasion of interest here.[23]

It remains to define those elements in the Gospel that are of most significance. In social memory research it is essential not to violate the narrativity of the text. The social memory is often a narrative kind of memory. This works in two ways. On the one hand, it is important to recognize the referential pastness of the story and keep apart those items which reflect the temporal distance and the ones which are in dialogue with the present situation and produce a sense of identification.[24] This is a difficult task, indeed. We will have to consider to what extent various items in the story are narratively integrated and resolved. The observation, for instance, that Jesus speaks of 'their synagogue(s)' (Matt 4.23; 9.35; 10.17; 12.9; 13.54) and 'your synagogues' (23.34) might have less to do with the author's ideological detachment from the Jews and more to do with the temporal distance of specifying the geographical and social reference in past history. Issues such as these are not left unresolved in the story and show that memory is indeed of the past. On the other hand, it is of interest to notice those items which reflect a sense of temporality that opens up the narrative unto the present time. It is true that the Gospel fails to trace any explicit continuity between its story and the group it supposedly represents,[25] but narratives produced by the social memory mostly betray this kind of continuity indirectly. Structural irregularities, surprisingly open endings, narrative movements linking the beginning and the end, and unresolved future references may be taken as indication that the remembered past dialogues with the thoughts, values and emotions of the remembering group. The remembered past is not 'cold' and historically closed.

(i) *Mnemonic Transitivity and Narrative Re-oralization*

We turn to the first point mentioned above. What traces and kinds of mnemonic transitivity and sites of memory are to be found in the Gospel of

22 R. Bauckham, 'For Whom Were the Gospels Written?', *The Gospels for All Christians*, 9–48 (26–30); for the implication of genre for the question of audience, see R. Burridge's contribution to the same volume, 'About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences', 113–45.

23 There is a problem of distinguishing between 'author' and *Sitz im Leben*. In this article I use 'author' for the person who was part of a small group of people and in close collaboration with them most actively influenced the composition of the Gospel.

24 Cf. J. V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002) 57–60. Wertsch distinguishes between the referential and dialogic functions of narratives.

25 Cf. Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 87.

Matthew? Surprisingly, in the new volume *Memory, Tradition, and Text* no one applies memory research to the question of the relationship between different biblical writings and the synoptics. Despite the potentials of social memory research for a modified view of literary interaction, scholarship seems to envision a process of copying and editing rather than remembering and performing.

As for the Gospel of Matthew, one might look at the interaction with Mark's Gospel. The decisive hint is that the first Gospel, having to be decoded as *scriptio continua*, was not reproduced redactionally as a written source, but reshaped as a remembered and internalized narrative.[26] It was probably available in a flexible written manuscript. The Matthean narrative integrates it, however, in a way which suggests that it was a text that was memorized and recalled at recurrent moments of oral performance. It reveals intricate patterns of mnemonic internalization.

It suffices to take two examples.[27] The author sometimes revised the order of the material. For instance, he abandoned the Markan narrative at Mark 1.39 in order to insert the Sermon on the Mount, but returned afterwards to Mark 1.22. Similarly, after relying on Mark 1.40–45 in Matt 8.1–4, he returned to Mark 1.29–34 in Matt 8.14–16, moved forward to Mark 4.35–5.20 in Matt 8.23–34, finally to move back to Mark 2 in Matt 9. Again, after having followed Mark up to 2.22, from Matt 9.18 he turned to verses and episodes occurring later on in the Markan narrative. Not until 12.1 did he return to Mark 2.23.

A comparable feature is the foreshadowing of Markan episodes which were to occur later on in the Matthean narrative. The account of the healing of the two blind men in Matt 9.27–31 has no parallel in the Gospel of Luke or at a comparable point in Mark's narrative, but gives a preliminary glimpse of a similar account in Matt 20.29–34 with a narrative parallel in Mark 10.46–52. Moreover, the Jesus sayings in Matt 10.17–18 and 10.21–22 have no corresponding parallel in Luke and

26 H. Gamble stresses that '*scriptio continua* is most easily read phonetically, with the aid of the ear: the sense of the text arises only as the syllables are pronounced and heard' ('Literacy, Liturgy, and the Shaping of the New Testament Canon', *The Earliest Gospels: The Origins and Transmission of the Earliest Christian Gospels – The Contribution of the Chester Beatty Gospel Codex P*^{45} [ed. C. Horton; London/New York: T&T Clark International, 2004] 27–39 [31]). For broader discussion, see Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1995).

27 Further discussion in Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher*, 331–49. Cf. now also A. D. Baum, 'Matthew's Sources – Written or Oral: A Rabbinic Analogy and Empirical Insights', *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (ed. J. Nolland and D. M. Gurtner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming). I differ from Baum in arguing that the author re-oralized a flexible written manuscript of Mark's Gospel instead of assuming that he drew independently from the same oral source as the author of Mark. The evidence is, however, ambiguous due to the overlapping between manuscript tradition and oral tradition. See D. C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Mark, but foreshadow Matt 24.9, 10, 13 with parallels in Mark 13.9, 12–13. Separate verses have the same foreshadowing function.[28]

These features – more could be added – would require a complicated technique of cross-checking had the author approached the Markan narrative as a fixed literary entity. The character of the text and the scroll permitted no such procedure.[29] These observations accord instead with Whitney Shiner's attempt to recover a typical performance of the Gospel of Mark in the first century. His study suggests that the performance of this Gospel was based on memorization of series of episodes. Reading from a manuscript would have restricted the performer's use of gestures and emotional appeal.[30] Although it is difficult to estimate the possibility that the Gospel of Mark is itself based on repeated oral performances, it seems likely that after its textualization it developed by being performed from memory again and again. If its textualization was deliberately made for oral performance, such a mnemonic activity would come as no surprise.[31] In other words, instead of objectifying the written text of Mark's Gospel, the Matthean author related to it as a site of memory that was heard, memorized and performed anew. The variations in terms of order and foreshadowing are but two indications of the mnemonic transitivity as a form of narrative re-oralization of written material.

(ii) *The 'In-Group' and the Mnemonic Synchronization*

The second issue mentioned above concerned the interaction between the typical situation of the 'in-group' and the specific situation of remembering together with others. Is there any evidence of persons of an 'in-group' who synchronized their social memory of the Jesus tradition at particular mnemonic occasions of the larger community?

The 'in-group' of the Matthean narrative is the disciples. The author's device to interrupt the flow of narration with long speeches indicates a didactic focus. The disciples are always present and seek to understand what Jesus says. Although they have little faith,[32] act cowardly (8.26), doubt that he will rescue and

28 Cf. 5.29, 30; 9.36 with 18.9, 8; 14.14 (par. in Mark 9.47, 43; 6.34).

29 Cf. already F. G. Kenyon, *Books and Readers in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1932) 66–7, 113. It has been pointed out again by, e.g., P. J. Achtemeier, '*Omne Verbum Sonat*: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity', *JBL* 109 (1990) 3–27 (27); Ø. Andersen, 'Oral Tradition', *Jesus and the Oral Gospel Tradition* (ed. H. Wansbrough; JSNTSup 61; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) 17–58 (44).

30 W. Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003) 103–25. Cf. also W. D. Shiell, *Reading Acts: The Lector and the Early Christian Audience* (BIS 70; Leiden: Brill, 2004).

31 The hypothesis that Mark's text includes features of oral composition and performances has been stated again by J. Dewey, 'The Survival of Mark's Gospel: A Good Story?', *JBL* 123 (2004) 495–507.

32 6.30; 8.26; 14.31; 16.8; 17.20.

accept them (14.31; 28.17), and are frightened (14.26, 30; 17.6) and indignant (20.24; 26.8), they are given to know the mysteries of the kingdom (13.11) and seek to understand and internalize in their hearts (13.15, 19) what Jesus tells them publicly and privately (16.12; 17.13). Jesus is their master, teaching them regularly and providing the means of understanding.

This group is presented realistically, with negative and positive traits. Such groups are easy to identify with. The author's peculiar way of recalling the disciples and ending the narrative with a command concerning their future task is an index of his own conception of being both a disciple of Jesus and a teacher of others.[33] He was part of a group which identified with the disciples. It was a group of those who had been entrusted with the teaching of Jesus in a special way and wished to communicate it to others.

The motif of scribal understanding is especially prominent as a point of identification. Already in 5.19, as Jesus instructs the disciples for the first time, the author indicates that they will one day themselves teach others the same things and in the same way as Jesus did.[34] This verse is future oriented, pointing beyond the pastness of the narrative. In 13.52, the paradigm of the ideal scribe who should penetrate and understand the Scripture and the meshalim (cf. Sir 39.1–3) is employed in reference to the disciples.[35] Not all the characters that wish to follow Jesus are scribes that understand,[36] but only those who have been instructed concerning the kingdom. This scribal trait recurs in 23.34. The 'prophets, sages and scribes' is probably a stylized expression referring to the disciples.[37] The trait is again opened up to the future. It is the last time the author speaks of scribes and he does so by depicting their persecution in the future tense. These references are all left unresolved in the story and linked to the future by allusion to the prospective didactic mission of the disciples at the end of the narrative. The didactic and scribal trait is thus transposed into the present time of recollection.

It is difficult to imagine that each and every person in a community of Jesus followers recognized themselves in this trait. Not all were teachers and not all

33 The climactic ending of Matthew's narrative not only brings the previous story to completion, but opens up the pastness of the story unto the present time of the author. I have discussed this in S. Byrskog, 'Slutet gott, allting gott: Matteus 28:16–20 i narrativt perspektiv', *Matteus och hans läsare – förr och nu* (FS B. Gerhardsson; ed. B. Olsson, S. Byrskog and W. Übelacker; Religio 48; Lund: Teologiska institutionen, 1997) 85–98.

34 S. Byrskog, 'Matthew 5:17–18 in the Argumentation of the Context', *RevB* 104 (1997) 557–71. Cf. recently R. Deines, *Die Gerechtigkeit der Tora im Reich des Messias: Mt 5,13–20 als Schlüsseltext der matthäischen Theologie* (WUNT 177; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004) 371–412.

35 D. E. Orton, *The Understanding Scribe: Matthew and the Apocalyptic Ideal* (JSNTSup 25; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989) 140–51.

36 The scribe in 8.19 is not one of the disciples. He addresses Jesus with διδάσκαλε while the disciples normally use κύριε.

37 Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher*, 244–5.

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were able to comprehend the mysteries of the kingdom. The texts indicate rather that the group who identified with this particular aspect of discipleship was made up of those who had the special duty to reflect upon, understand and teach the Jesus tradition.[38] In that case, the narration gives a glimpse of a *Sitz im Leben* that was separate from the activities of the mnemonic community at large.

It is also one that was related to it. The 'scribal disciples' synchronized their memory of the Jesus tradition when they 'co-remembered' together with a broader audience of believers. The first narrative indication in 5.19 that the disciples one day will be teachers of others is picked up at the very end of the narrative. Just as Jesus exhorts the disciples not to set aside one of the least of 'these commandments' when they are to teach others, so he commissions them to teach the nations to observe everything that he has commanded them. The similarities in concepts and future orientation are striking and indicate a didactic, narrative *inclusio*. To be noted is that the teaching is presented together with baptism as the second aspect of the one comprehensive act of making disciples. The disciples are thus not merely a scribal group unto themselves. The teaching of the Jesus tradition relates to a communal activity of initiation.

This remembrance of structurally significant and future oriented references joining the baptismal and the didactic activity into one grand act of making disciples, suggests a mnemonic situation in the community at large when the scribal group of experts synchronized their memories of Jesus. The baptism could be a ritual occasion connected with catechetical teaching as well as with common mimetic performances of Jesus tradition. Both contained elements of mnemonic synchronization, because in antiquity both activities were normally conducted in close dialogue with the audience. In terms of social memory, it seems that the group of experts interacted with the socializing dynamics of the mnemonic community at large in connection with baptism. New members were to enter into the community. They had to be instructed about its precious memories and jointly socialized into its narrative history, so that they ultimately would come to remember it as if it was part of their own past and experience the communal boundaries to be coextensive with the shared memories. Remembering and re-experiencing the past were to be fused into one comprehensive event.[39]

(iii) *The individuality of the collective memory*

The third issue raised above asked about a distinction between the social and the collective memory. Is there any indication in the Matthean narrative of such a distinction?

38 Luz holds the view that 13.52 points to special theologians as distinct from the disciples (*Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* [Mt 8–17] [EKK 1/2; Zürich: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990] 362–6). But the disciples are throughout the narrative educated to become scribes and teachers of what Jesus has taught them.

39 Cf. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 45–51.

Not immediately, but we find indications that the collective memory which was affecting each person's social construction of the past contained traces of didactic elements and personal recollection. The narration gives prominence to Peter. He is the 'first' one among the disciples (10.2). The pattern of focusing on and naming him is not entirely consistent, but sufficiently clear.[40] He is presented realistically as a round character and a specifically named individual.

It is this character that the author singles out as the rock of the *ekklesia*. Within a frame of reference to all the disciples (16.13–15, 20), he is addressed personally in 16.17–19. His authorization, which is didactic,[41] is remembered as an event that crosses the boundaries of the narrative past and points to the future. In 16.18–19, future verb constructions describe the building of the community and the giving of the keys. Also the binding and loosing has a future dimension. The conditional construction with the two aorist subjunctives indicates that the extension of authority is not yet a full reality but something to be expected in the future. The two periphrastic future perfects ἔσται δεδεμένον and ἔσται λελυμένον convey perhaps the impression that the future teaching will be a result of what has been decided in heaven.

By contrast, Peter's last appearance in the story is his strong public denial of Jesus (26.69–75). He often misunderstands Jesus and is far from being an ideal student. The Matthean narrative is strikingly silent about him in 28.7 (cf. Mark 16.7). There is instead a final narrative failure. His glorious future never comes real in the story. It lies beyond the narrative time.

This narrative ambiguity fosters questions concerning what happened afterwards and opens up the story unto the present time of recall. One possible reaction was to resolve the narrative uncertainties by vindicating Peter and establishing his didactic authority through the on-going activities of the mnemonic group itself. The failures of historic heroes may thus make their position in the group stronger. As for Peter's authority to hand on Jesus' teaching, the remembrance of both his future-oriented authorization as well as his final failure could indicate that he was now serving as a mnemonic other monitored by the group as a point of decisive reference for how to remember Jesus. He was vindicated in the present. Perhaps they had exceptional memories of his time with Jesus – there is special material associated with him besides the one concerning his authorization (14.28–31; 17.24–27).

The narration hence suggests that there existed an intricate interplay between the social and the individual aspects of the collective memory. We cannot, of

40 T. Wiarda, *Peter in the Gospels: Pattern, Personality and Relationship* (WUNT 2/127; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 91–9.

41 I discuss the major interpretations of binding and loosing in Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher*, 246–9.

course, detect traces of how single members mentally interacted with the collective force of remembering and tradition. Moreover, the Petrine tradition was probably negotiated in communal performances and discussions. However, we detect narrative hints that the collective memory which influenced the social memory of the individuals was not devoid of didactic particularities and personal recollections. In this way, the mnemonic socialization, being indeed a social and communal event, was not merely a matter of integrating new members into an anonymous body of collectively shared memories, but of introducing them also to what was cherished as the memories of Peter.

(iv) ***The mnemonic patterning of historical continuity***

As to the fourth issue, we asked about the basic mnemonic structures according to which one patterned the past and reconfigured Jesus. The social memory usually seeks to maintain historical continuity. It connects the past to the present either by coagulating separate patches of history into a single, seemingly continuous experiential stream or by separating one supposedly discrete historical period from the next.

Zerubavel points to an important expression of such 'social punctuation' of history, namely, the mental differentiation of the historical from the 'pre-historical' through the establishment of beginnings.[42] The 'depth' of memory is manifested especially in the way we begin historical narratives. Everything that preceded the beginning is regarded as pre-history which we can practically forget. This division of the past is a normative convention revealing the social rules of memory.

The author of Matthew extended the beginning of history back to Abraham. The pre-history that the Markan narrative failed to mention should not be forgotten, but integrated into history. He links this beginning to the present time in two ways: first, he relates it to the time of Jesus by means of a genealogy; secondly, he relates it to the time of remembering by extending the closure of Mark's narrative into a climactic and indefinite end.

As to the first point, it is noteworthy that social memory often relates to the past by means of ancestry and descent.[43] For all the problems of Matthew's genealogy, it is evident that it helps bridge the beginning and the time of Jesus. The repeated birth language – ἐγέννησεν is hammered in 38 times – points to the most compelling semblance of social connection by involving the element of biological continuity. For Zerubavel this kind of 'consanguinity' is the functional equivalent of geographical proximity in the way we mentally construct natural connectedness.[44] When the author separated this connectedness into three times

42 Zerubavel, 'Social Memories', 287; idem, *Time Maps*, 8, 101–10.
43 Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 55–81.
44 Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 56.

fourteen generations, he in fact punctuated the beginning of history into three interrelated segments of progression culminating with the birth of Jesus Christ. That this punctuation contains irregularities is striking and implies a deliberate process of mnemonic socialization.

The further back the beginning, the more inclusive it becomes. The Jewish people looked upon Abraham as the ancestor of themselves and a multitude of nations (Gen 17.4–5).[45] Some rabbis regarded him as the ancestor of the proselytes, or a proselyte himself.[46] He was remembered as an inclusive ancestral point of reference and served as a prototype of various Jewish communities of the first century ce.[47]

This 'inclusive depth' of memory opens up a connectedness to the author's own time. He prepared in several ways the narrative extension in 28.18–20 by including signals of the connectedness of the beginning of history and the present time of mission. Perhaps the much discussed reference to four women in the genealogy – probably two being Canaanites, one being a Moabite and one being the wife of a Hittite – is one way of linking the universal horizon of the present to the beginning. Of more significance is the future-oriented mention of Abraham in 8.11. Adding to the episode about the healing of a centurion's servant (cf. Luke 7.1–10; John 4.46b–54) the saying about many people from east and west, the author indicates that Jesus' ministry ultimately will reach to all nations. Significantly, he is not only alone in recalling the saying in this context, but while the Lukan author elsewhere separates Abraham, Isaac and Jacob from the event when people from all corners of the earth will eat in the kingdom of God (Luke 13.28–29), he remembers Jesus as saying that they will be included in the heavenly meal. The three patriarchs were mentioned first in the genealogy. History begins and ends with them.

The beginning and the end of the story are primary indices of the mnemonic structure that helped pattern the past and create historical continuity. Jesus of history was reconfigured as a person narratively connected to the past, the present and the future. The *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospel remembered, reconstructed *and* reconfigured Jesus, probably not simultaneously but certainly in interaction. Also in the work of reconstruction the author and his group situated themselves in line with the beginning of history. They were not ignorant of the narrative frame of their memories. They had been given the ability to understand. In other words, the social rules of remembrance determined by the mnemonic others of the group

45 Cf., e.g., Gen 18.18; 22.18; 1 Macc 12.21; Sir 44.19, 21; Josephus *Ant.* XII.226.

46 Cf., e.g., *Mek.* on 22.20 (Lauterbach 3.140.31–32, 36–41), *b. Sukk.* 49b; *b. Ḥag.* 3a; *Tanh. B.* לך לך 6.

47 For the use of social memory in relation to Abraham, see P. F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 171–94.

selected and arranged the beginning and the end precisely in order to make history serviceable to the present.

(v) ***Social memory and social identity***

The various aspects of social memory discussed above all lead up to the question of identity. What kind of orientational function did memory have for the sense of identity of those participating in the *Sitz im Leben*?

The social memory approach highlights that groups usually rely on the shared memory to claim and negotiate identity. It challenges scholars who focus on the identity of the Matthean community only as part of its relationship to contemporary ethnic, religious and political groups and points to the mnemonic and narrative activity in which some of its members were deeply involved.

The idea that identity is rooted in the persistence through time brings into focus the temporal dimension of memory. Conceptions of time have always been regarded as vital for how memory works. In the first extensive discussion of memory and recollection, Aristotle stresses that recognition of time is essential for recollection – τὸ δὲ μέγιστον γνωρίζειν δεῖ τὸν χρόνον (*Mem.* 452b.7). True recollection occurs when the movement between the images of the past corresponds with a sense of time. The past is neither only past nor only present. Recollection navigates between the initial impression and its present return. Aristotle's contribution was to preserve a space for discussion of what Paul Ricoeur called 'the presence of the absent'.[48] Memory was indeed of the past – it was not sheer imagination – but to remember meant recollectively to position oneself in time through an intricate mental synopsis of identification and distance and, by implication, to foster a sense of belonging to that absent presence.

Identity can be seen as that social aspect of each individual that derives from belonging to a particular group.[49] Being socialized into that group's memories and thereby identifying with its collective past is part of the process of acquiring social identity. All the various aspects discussed above of how social memory operates thus interact to form a 'memory-critical' index of the cognitive, emotional and evaluative experience of becoming and being involved in the Matthean *Sitz im Leben*.

The Markan narrative was the decisive site of memory. It was heard, memorized and performed anew. This kind of re-oralization generates negotiation for shared meaning and cohesion. The Gospel of Matthew may be seen as a

48 P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 19.

49 H. Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For its temporal aspects, cf. M. Cinnirella, 'Exploring Temporal Aspects of Social Identity: The Concept of Possible Social Identities', *European Journal of Social Psychology* 28 (1998) 227–48. For a stronger focus on the sociological aspect of social identity, cf. R. Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London/New York: Routledge, 2nd ed. 2004).

mnemonic moment of re-oralization of the Markan narrative. The social identity thus has a strong mnemonic and narrative dimension to it. The retelling of Mark as a kind of narrative orality points to a performance which positioned itself mnemonically in relation to the narrative past which it retells. It mirrors a *Sitz im Leben* which socially taught those involved to care about the past as a narrative entity to be mnemonically internalized, and to evaluate their belonging accordingly.

This sense of belonging produced a feeling of internal cohesion. The persons participating in the *Sitz im Leben* identified with the 'in-group' of the narrative and nourished a scribal self-image. The author and his fellow-workers, by commemorating the Markan account, encoded their strongly felt obligation to comprehend the Jesus tradition into the account of the special privilege of the disciples. Their social memory was a memory that sought to understand. This memory was probably synchronized with the memory of others at mnemonic occasions in the larger group of believers. To what extent this involved a mere blending of memories in joint acts of commemoration or a more systematic deliberation of what and how to remember is difficult to say, but the strong sense of cohesion and scribal identity indicates that the memory of the 'in-group' had some priority and that its members functioned as important mnemonic others of the ones being socialized into the community at large.

Also deceased persons can become mnemonic others. Peter probably served to specify the memories of Jesus in a way which balanced the collective force of remembrance and mnemonic socialization. Those participating in the *Sitz im Leben* looked at themselves as the didactic heirs of Peter. They remembered his authorization and positioned themselves in relation to it.

Finally, as Zerubavel states, '*Origins* help articulate identities, and where communities locate their beginnings tells us quite a lot about how they perceive themselves'.[50] The *Sitz im Leben* of Matthew was one that cherished a sense of historical continuity all the way back to Abraham. History was not punctuated into a threefold or twofold salvation history. It was patterned as a continuum of fulfilment, from the beginning up to the present time. While the adherence to Mark and the scribal and Petrine aspects of the social identity concerned directly the task of caring for, performing and narrating the Jesus tradition, the inclusion of Abraham and his descendants placed those involved in line with the beginning of history culminating in Jesus. As they commemorated this remembered history, they cultivated a strong sense of temporal belonging and felt that their own time of mission was part of a larger purpose.

50 Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 101.