

The shaping stratum of the Markan passion narrative

**Author:**Mphumezi Hombana¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Mphumezi Hombana,
m.hombana@up.ac.za

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Hombana

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This study is an attempt to investigate the shaping stratum of the Markan passion narrative (PN). The ultimate focus is on discovering the factors behind the text of Mark that influenced the shaping of the passion account. Since early form criticism, there has been an assumed tradition of an early existing passion account prior to the Markan narrative, to which we do not have access in our contemporary world. However, this study argues that the PN is shaped not only by a tradition to which we do not have access, as argued by previous form critics but also perhaps by how one would describe any crucifixion in antiquity. As we possibly know, this could be true of any early tradition, including the PN in Mark. In other words, this paper is thus proposing a shift from a possible oral source (tradition) to general literary influences that shaped the Markan PN. This means we can see possible influences that determine what would be part of a narrative of a noble death from within Graeco-Roman and Jewish literary influences despite the fact that we cannot get hold of Mark's traditional sources. This paper utilises historical criticism as the method to investigate the shaping stratum of the Markan PN.

Contribution: So, an access to these literary influences serves as an adequate tool to aid the contemporary reader to adequately understand Mark's PN as the death and resurrection of Jesus are the integral part in the whole story of Christianity. An understanding of this remarkable account is very significant for churches in Africa and worldwide too.

Keywords: passion narrative; noble death; pre-Markan sources; Jewish and Graeco-Roman literature; form critics; shaping stratum; historical criticism.

Introduction

Interpreters have claimed since the introduction of form criticism that there existed a fairly well-formed, maybe even definitively fixed, version of the passion narrative (PN) anterior to the writing of the first written gospel. The length of time between Jesus' death and the writing of the first Gospel necessitated an oral-tradition transmission mechanism (Soards 2000:387–388). The PNs have been determined to be a lengthy, logically progressive succession of short pericopae, seemingly related, and even dependent on one another in producing a bigger cohesive account compared with other stories and sections of the Gospels (Green 1992:163). The portions of the Gospels prior to the Passion accounts, on the other hand, were brief, ostensibly self-contained units that could be, and likely were, organised in any sequence the evangelists wished (Stein 2008:705). However, the focus of this paper is that since early form criticism, there has been a presumption that there formerly existed a passion account before the Markan narrative, which is unavailable to us in the modern era. As opposed to earlier form opponents' claims, this study contends that the PN is also shaped by a tradition to which we do not have access. It may have been influenced by how crucifixions were typically described in antiquity. As far as we can tell, both the PN in Mark and an old tradition might hold loyal to it. In other words, this research is advocating a change away from a potential oral source (tradition) and towards broader literary influences that influenced the shaping of Markan PN. Hence, in this project, historical criticism is employed as an investigative tool to investigate the shaping stratum of Mark's PN.

Theories proposed by form critics on the composition of Mark's passion narrative

The majority of academics in NT research agree that the PNs point to the existence of a source that precedes the second gospel. Evans (2001:352) points out that despite this agreement, there are a number of opposing theories on the precise makeup of these sources and the degree of each evangelist's redaction. Examining the various proposals is therefore crucial.

Note: Special Section: HTS Historical Thought and Source Interpretation.

Presumed source(s) from before Mark's passion narrative

While the overall structure of Mark's narrative supports the earlier critical judgement on its cohesiveness, form-critical investigations have shown that some of Mark's passages may have evolved from earlier traditions.

Primary proposals for the pre-Markan source theories

It is perhaps critical at this juncture to further investigate the logic behind both the source and form-critical discoveries that led to their conclusions. Hence, the following sub-headings aid the reader to better follow the argument. Herein are what we may call three primary theoretical proposals:

Longer pre-Markan theory

An earlier generation of source critics made an effort to look into the sources used to create the passion story. The primary issue under investigation was whether Mark used a previously published text that was available to him. They came to the conclusion that a pre-Markan passion story existed and that Mark drew on it to write his gospel. Early in the 20th century, form critics found the PN's relative self-sufficiency and coherence, uniformity in time and space and intrinsic parallelism in the order of the narrative among the four canonical Gospels to be particularly noteworthy. The PN, they claimed, is more difficult to dissect than other parts of the Gospels. Everything seems to flow naturally from the occasions that led up to Jesus' trial and on to his death or resurrection. The sources, substance and intent of the passion tale have been the subject of disagreement among researchers despite their agreement on some issues.

The majority of academics consequently view its source material as a single narrative, but Nickelsburg (1992:176) claims that there are still numerous unanswered concerns regarding the structure of the pre-Markan passion traditions. Most scholars agree that the Pauline letters contain the oldest existing written evidence of a passion tradition. The paragraph on the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:23–26), which makes reference to the wine and the bread as well as a future anticipation of the things to come, may suggest a more detailed account similar to that contained in the larger Lukan text (Lk 22:17–22). The author of Hebrews, subsequent non-gospel text, shows familiarity with either the Gethsemane narrative or a description of Jesus' execution, which ends at his death on the cross, as shown in Hebrews 5:7–10. Having stated these proposals, it may as well be crucial to further look at the detailed analytical theoretical proposals that suggest assumed sources prior to Mark's PN. This concern attempts to help the reader to delve deeper into the understanding of form critics' positions with reference to how and why they reached their conclusions. As indicated in the 'Introduction' section, this paper takes historical criticism¹ as a method to investigate the shaping stratum of Mark's PN.

¹Generally, the chief objective of this method of interpretation is to discover the text's prehistoric or original meaning from its original historical situation and its literal sense.

The multi-stage theory

One prominent theory proposed by early form critics is the multi-stage theory. In this stage, growth begins with a rough outline (as in Mk 10:33–34; Ac 13:27–29; or 1 Cor 15:3–5), and it ends with a condensed narrative that starts with Jesus' incarceration. As a result, it was suggested that the extra information had been added to this brief story in order to create the longer narratives of the four canonical Gospels. Thus, a number of multi-source hypotheses were created (Green 2013:663). The parallels between Mark and John's accounts of the passion also imply some degree of interdependence between the Fourth Gospel and the Second Gospel. One possibility is that they had a similar rendition of the passion story.

The passion tale, according to Dibelius (1934:178), is an exception to the rule that the stories in the Synoptic Gospels were initially passed down as independent stories. According to him, the connection between the events of Jesus' Sanhedrin trial and the empty tomb is undeniable. He writes: 'The relative self-sufficiency strikes everyone who reads the traditional story of the Passion which has come down to us'. He asserts that in order to create his passionate tale, Mark has added only five anecdotes to this one. These are the anointing at Bethany (Mk 14:3–9), the Passover preparation (Mk 14:12–16), some of the Gethsemane account (Mk 14:39–42), some of the priests' hearing (Mk 14:59–65) and the account of the empty tomb (Mk 16:1–8). To put it another way, there were detractors of the form who contested the idea that there might have been a single shared source. They contend that Mark produced his story using original material rather than using an expanded source. Thus, they argue that Mark's tale is made up of discrete pieces of the source material rather than being one continuous story. The Markan PN can be divided into smaller segments, according to Bultmann (1963:275–284), who uses 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 to make this claim. He argues that portions of the PN could exist independently of the story of Jesus' trial and execution. Bultmann (1963:262–284) thinks that the evangelist added details and stories, including those about Peter, the journey to the home of the high priests and the denials, as well as whole passages like the plot of the priests (Mk 14:1–2), the anointing at Bethany (Mk 14:3–9), the treachery of Judas, the institution of the Lord's Supper (Mk 14:22–25), the events at Gethsemane (Mk 15:42–47). Additionally, he makes the assumption that a simple story about Jesus' arrest, trials, journey to the cross, crucifixion and death gradually evolved over time. He contends that the PNs contain novelistic, parenetic and dogmatic themes and that the Old Testament functioned as an inspiration.

Single source theory

The earlier Christian community in Jerusalem, according to Pesch (1994:1–27), had a longer pre-Markan passion story. He believes that Mark 8:27 marks the beginning of the pre-Markan PN, which goes on until the end of Mark's Gospel, including the discovery of the empty tomb. He argues that Mark wrote the first half of his gospel first and then added

the second half to it (Mk 1:14; 3:6; 6:14–29). Similarly, Crossan (1988:16–30) proposes that the ‘Cross Gospel’, which he refers to as the initial layer of the Gospel of Peter, was the source. He contends that the narrative flow of the Cross Gospel is tightly cohesive, starting with the crucifixion and deposition, continuing through the tomb and guards and ending with the resurrection and confession. Mark relied on a single source for his account of his passion, according to Soards (1994:1522–1524), although he only left a few hints of this in Mark 14:10 and 14:23. Soards believes that Judas’ emergence as one of the Twelve is extremely unique and is a hint of the underlying source.

Navigating through the Greco-Roman-literature

Having explored briefly the views of the form critics as to how they position themselves on the making process of Mark’s PN, it will now do us well to consider investigating both Greco-Roman and Jewish literature as possible literary influences for the shaping of the Markan PN. It was Yarbrow Collins (1994:482) who once raised triggering questions on this subject, which are very significant for our further explorations to enhance the argumentation of this paper. For instance, was Jesus’ death intended to be heroic or noble in the PN? On the other hand, was the PN founded on a particularly Jewish model that is vastly different from or similar to the Greek tradition of a heroic death? On the basis of tenacious historical facts and the creativity sparked by those events, must we, at the end, draw the conclusion that the tale of Jesus’ death is wholly novel? Perhaps it was in some way influenced by such literary influences from both traditions.

According to MacDonald (2006:372–373), the standard edition of the Greek New Testament has an appendix cataloguing references and allusions to works of literature other than the New Testament. Three thousand allusions to the Old Testament and 3000 from Jewish texts can be found. There are five allusions for the entirety of Pagan Greek literature, just two of which are poems: one from Mendar (342–292 BCE) and one from Euripides (c480–c406 BCE). The same deafening silence pervades almost all New Testament introductions, several commentaries and even volumes intended to situate the New Testament in its pre-Christian literary context. Scholars naturally turn to Jewish literature – the Bible above all – or to modern Greek literature or to works in the same genre when trying to place early Christian narrative in its literary context.

In light of this, one can speculate that Jewish and Greco-Roman literature, both of which contain tales of heroic people suffering, may have had an influence on the writers of the PNs found in all four gospels. Mark’s passion story was influenced by earlier sources that related to Jesus’ suffering and death, including pre-Christian analogies to the passion in Jewish and Greco-Roman literature, according to Larsen (2016:140–160). Herodotus refers to the genre of some Greek writings as ‘*teleutai*’, which refers to the subject’s conclusion.

The most obvious pre-Christian genre that appears to have affected the writing of the PNs in the gospels in Greco-Roman literature is the topic of noble-death fiction.

The death of Socrates, according to Hägg (2012:236–237), is the origin of the genre known as *teleutai* in the Hellenistic period. Two concerns about the genre’s structure and production are carefully distinguished by Collins (1994:487). She points out that the PNs might be viewed as death reports, comparable to the death of Socrates in terms of form. In reality, Collins (1993:3–28)’s pioneering article ‘The Genre of the Passion Narrative’ has as its main goal to decipher the literary genre of the PN. She offers a case for the pre-Markan narrative being of the genre that emerged as a result of the documentation of Jewish and Greco-Roman aristocratic demises.

She contends that the prevalence and importance of this general perception are demonstrated by the fact that Christian scholars have also applied the term ‘martyrdom’ to Jewish and Greco-Roman texts, particularly to passages in Second and Fourth Maccabees. According to Collins (1993:10), this book follows after the second volume of Maccabees; (4 Maccabees, written by an unknown Hellenistic Jewish person in an urban setting of the Greek East, probably between 20 and 54 CE) and the *Acta Alexandrinorum*, also known as the Acts of the Pagan Martyrs. She further provides an ephemeral appraisal and evaluation of scholarly contributions on this issue from both Jewish and Hellenistic works. Furthermore, she touches on another Hellenistic work, known as ‘*exitus illustrium virorum*’. In relation to this work, she directs our attention to the following volumes: 14–16 of the Annals contain accounts of notable people who died willingly, who were assassinated or expatriated throughout the rule of Nero. The most renowned of these is the obligatory *felo-de-se* of Seneca. The version varieties clearly that the death of Seneca was projected to be an archetype for others. He definitely looked up to Socrates as well. In his dying words, he expressed his love for the Liberator by offering a drink. So, seeing death as a release from the oppressor, he embraced it.

Wilson (2007:141–169) points out a number of parallels between Socrates and Jesus’ trials and executions (see also Cullman 1955:1023). Socrates has no fear of death because it frees us from our bodies. Whoever is afraid of death loves the world of the body and is completely immersed in the world of the senses. Death is a tremendous friend to the soul. So, he teaches, and so he dies – this man who personified the Greek world in its greatest form – in wonderful accord with his teaching. For instance, both incidents occurred during an important religious holiday. Socrates and Jesus both had followers. Both of them went through an unfair legal process after being charged with deceiving their supporters. Finally, because of their unyielding adherence to their beliefs, they were both executed. The problem here is not that the authors of the Gospels merely repeated Socrates’ trial and execution; rather, it is that the Greco-Roman world found Socrates’ account to be compelling. Therefore, as Collins (1994:500–501) notes, the second line of Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer, ‘not what

I wish, but what you want', may have appeared to Greek or Hellenised readers of the Markan passion tale as being comparable to Socrates' and his imitators' peaceful acceptance of death.

Because the story of a noble dying was commonly used as a teaching tool in literature, readers might have expected a more verbose Jesus in the scene before Pilate. The virtual silence of Jesus is striking, even though one can discern some similarities with the *Acts of the Alexandrians*, especially when we consider the scene of Jesus before Pontius Pilate. Hence, it seems likely that the pre-Markan PN can be best accepted as an early Christian reworking of the prevalent and well-recognised Greek genre *τελευτή*.

Navigating through the Jewish literature

The majority of Jewish writers produced Greek-language literature, mostly between the middle of the 3rd century BCE and the end of the 2nd century CE. We do not have many surviving examples of Jewish writing in Greek before or after this time. This is not to imply that Jews wrote only in Greek throughout that time. The collections of Dead Sea Scrolls that were discovered close to Qumran during this time were written largely in Hebrew, with a smaller number in Aramaic and Greek. This is convincing proof according to Adams (2020a). Scholars have grown more convinced that 'Hellenism' and 'Judaism' throughout the Hellenistic and Roman eras were not separate, wholly unrelated ideologies as a result of the work of Martin Hengel (1974:10–36) and others (Barclay 1996:92–98). A 'pure' Judaism that was 'contained' or 'uninfected' by the Hellenistic scourge was no longer tenable. Jews lived alongside everyone else in the ancient world. For academics, it is crucial to acknowledge this integration as it enables us to draw linkages across ancient cultures.

In the Jewish tradition, stories of suffering and vindication were well known. Willem van Henten (2007:195) is of the opinion that Josephus is a prominent figure to be considered in the search for the noble death in second Temple Judaism. This is because of 51 related passages ensuing a relatively slight classification of noble death as a legendary phenomenon based on three criteria:

- focus on a violent death, sometimes self-inflicted, but in any case, forced by the circumstances
- a positive assessment of this death
- vocabulary and/or motifs typical of noble death passages.

He further provides three reasons why Josephus' noble death passages deserve a serious consideration in today's world. Firstly, Josephus' heroic dying passages are important resources for understanding how Jews constructed their identities, and some of them continue to have an influence today. Secondly, as parts of Josephus' passages about Jewish noble death appear to be equivocal concerning the practice, they merit more investigation. Thirdly, it is crucial to

consider whether these passages or at least some of them reflect reliable traditions. This is in addition to the issues of Josephus' potential ambiguity regarding noble death and the relevance of his passages on noble death for identity constructions, both ancient and modern. Or to put it another way, are the words and/or themes utilised in these sections consistent with Josephus' own interpretation, or are they derived from earlier, perhaps more reliable traditions?

In his discussion of Josephus' noble death passages, Willem van Henten attends to a few significant issues, the correspondences with martyrdom, self-killings and noble death and Jewish people. The early martyr scriptures, such as 2 Maccabees 6:18–31 and 7. However, none of Josephus' passages should be regarded as martyr texts in and of themselves because the Jewish heroes in these passages are not compelled to engage in actions that are contrary to Jewish law and tradition. However, numerous sections from Josephus have strong formal, thematic and lexical connections to early Jewish martyr texts (see War 1.6, 7, 9, 27, 39, 40 and 44). Josephus regularly associates the entirety of Jewish people with heroic dying images, painting them in this way in a particular light. Numerous passages, particularly in *The Jewish War* and *Against Apion*, make brief mentions of Jews' valiant ways of passing away and general disdain for death, sometimes explicitly linked to a strict adherence to Jewish law (no. War 8, 9, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 26, etc.). *The Jewish War* also makes several brief mentions of Jews' valiant ways of passing away without providing much commentary (War. 3.320–321, 475, 5.315, 7.406, cf. 5.88 and Ant. 17.256). One instance is the hatred that Titus and Vespasian received from Jewish rebels after they held their deaths in disdain because they rightfully chose freedom over slavery and wanted to do as much harm to the Romans as they could while they were still alive (War. 5.458). The reader is given an impression of the Jews as a people who were renowned for their disdain for death as a result of the repetition of such statements over time.

Josephus brings up this subject specifically in *Against Apion*, however, by stressing numerous times that every Jew would willingly die for the ancestors' rules if required (Apion 1.42–43, 1.190–193 quoting Hecataeus, 2.146, 218–235, 293–294). In *Apion* 1.42–44, Josephus notes a discrepancy between Jews and Greeks in relation to how the Jews approach their own sacred Scriptures, which they regard as God's commands:

[... And it is natural for all Jews, right the day of their birth, to consider them as God's decrees, abide by them, and if necessary, gladly die for them [...]

The rest of this short sentence implies that Jews have exhibited this mentality frequently throughout history:

Indeed, many times already many prisoners were seen enduring not a single word against the laws and the documents that go with it. (1.43).

The Spartans, who had a stellar military reputation, are contrasted with the Jews by Josephus. They were renowned

for their disdain for death, adherence to the law and specific approach to education. By pointing out that the Spartans only kept their laws as long as they were independent, whereas the Jews had never broken their laws – not even during the worst suffering – Josephus comes to the conclusion that the Jews were superior to even the Spartans (Ap. 2.226–8). The section concerning the Masada suicide that is translated here demonstrates both Josephus' propensity to emphasise the honourable deaths of Jews and his own ambivalence over such a death. Book 7 of Josephus' Jewish War contains the Masada event, and it may have been finished in the early years of Trajan (98–117 CE). The mass suicide of the Jewish rebels at Masada in the aftermath of the War against Rome (66–70) is a well-known incident, not least because the site has been transformed into a popular tourist destination. Since the 1930s, Masada has been one of the most significant symbols of Israeli identity. The excavations and Yigael Yadin's initial publication about them in 1966 sparked a fresh wave of enthusiasm.

There are numerous references in the Hebrew Bible to righteous people whose suffering was divinely justified. As a result, the Hebrew Bible is referenced so frequently in the PN, including direct quotes, indirect references and paraphrases (Is 53; LXX Ps 21, 40, 41, 42, 68, 108). These texts are not stories, but they seem to have influenced how the story of Jesus' suffering, crucifixion and death was told. The suffering of the virtuous is said to comprise aspects of the PN in Wisdom 2:12–20 and 5:1–7, according to Ruppert (1972:23). The Jewish legends of persecution and redemption contain a number of other themes, as noted by Nickelsburg (1980:153–184). He further recognises most of these components in Mark's passion tale after identifying most of them (but not all) in the stories of Joseph (Gn 37–50), Ahikar, Esther, Daniel 3 and 6, Susanna, Wisdom of Solomon 2 to 5, 2 Maccabees 7 and 3 Maccabees. According to Aus (2008:225–228), the gospel stories of Jesus were impacted by the death, burial and translation of Moses in heaven. Thus, the early Christians (who were Jews) would have heard and repeated the tale of Jesus in light of Jewish literature about the suffering of the righteous. The numerous references to the Old Testament found in the passion tales and other early Christian writings provide credence to this theory.

In conclusion, Josephus makes infrequent references in *The Jewish Wars* and the *Antiquities of the Jews* to the Jews' apparent scorn for torture and death in *Against Apion*, as well as to their willingness to die for their laws if necessary. Because of their unparalleled willingness to suffer and die for their laws, he seems to consistently and comprehensively portray them as a rare people in *Against Apion*. This extolling of his own people's obedience to the law even evokes a stereotype that, while incredibly positive in the context of Greco-Roman noble death practices, might easily move in the opposite direction and portray Jews as stubborn and naively accepting of anguish and awful death.

Summary-correspondences between noble death narratives with the death of Jesus

This section seeks to provide a summary of the previous section. By so doing, the idea is to explore some possible similarities and differences between these accounts with that of Jesus in the form of the Markan version we have access to. From a genre perspective, Mark made some substantial changes to the story of Jesus' resurrection. At the end, a description of three women's futile efforts to locate and anoint the body is provided. This scenario is a Christian interpretation of a common genre in Greek and Roman traditions, disappearance stories that allude to the protagonist being taken to paradise.

Based on the above discussion, mostly on literary grounds, many academics have concluded that Mark was not the first to pen the PN. Collins (1994:489) provides an insightful idea that clearly sums up key pointers noted by form critics. Meanwhile, Collins points out some possible issues that could have been helpful should they have been considered. As argued by form critics, when one contrasts the second half of the Gospel with the first half of Gospel, Mark's chapters 14 and 15 exhibit a far higher level of coherence and temporal and spatial specificity. A discrepancy in his sources could account for this variation. There is a lot of information in these chapters that cannot be broken down into segments of separate oral traditions. The tentative reconstruction of Mark's source is made feasible by the ability of these chapters to discern between tradition and redaction. Reconstruction of the social context of such a document is necessary to support the idea that there existed a pre-Markan passion tale. A passage with this kind of intent might have been written for liturgical purposes, such as to be read aloud at a community commemoration of the anniversary of Jesus' death. Or it could have been written for catechetical purposes, either for people preparing to train new converts or for those who were writing catechisms. Another alternative, overlooked by form critics, is that the text was likely written by an educated community member as they articulated their Christian faith; this act may be seen as a kind of self-expression and self-definition. It is also important to note one of the significant differences of the Markan version of the passion when compared with that of the noble death of both Jewish and Greco-roman literature. In all four canonical NT Gospels, the focal point attested by the death of Jesus as opposed to that of other literature is the salvation of humanity from sin. In all these accounts, the death of Jesus was more than a political restoration of his people but a restoration of the broken relationship between God and his people. Evans (2006:806–807) notes that the depictions of the events leading up to and culminating in the crucifixion in each of the synoptic Gospels are all distinctively different. Jesus' death is depicted in Matthew as an apocalyptic event, and Mark links his death and resurrection to God's divine plan, with his death serving as the centrepiece of the salvific scheme. This

then prepares the reader for the next sub-section that aims at taking the conversation forward.

Navigating through the Markan text

It is clear from this survey that forms critics have argued that Mark utilised a source or sources for the shaping of his text although they seem to differ in terms of the nature and number of sources Mark utilised. Having investigated all these hypothetical theories made by form critics, it seems plausible at this juncture to consider the Markan text. In consideration of these hypothetical theories, let us assume they are valid. The question is then this: Is it possible to distinguish the evangelist's hand from the text itself? In search of the shaping stratum of the Markan PN, there are at least two possible explanations. One could take a direction of either literary or historical explanations. What is meant by reading the text literarily is the exercise of reading the existing text of Mark verse by verse and chapter by chapter until the end. Meanwhile, one has to keep in mind that behind the existing text, there is history that played a very significant role in the genesis of the text we currently hold in our hands. Hence, it is very true that reading the text literarily seems more plausible than utilising historical explanations, as there seems to be more available data to explore, contrary to the assumptions made by the form critics. One of the biggest issues with the latter is that Mark is the only extant source we have. Having said that, it is important to note that early form critics right up to the work of the systematic theologian Karl Barth assume an existing pre-Markan tradition. This is not all satisfying, but this is not to say it is all invalid. However, one has to acknowledge the fact that it is in some way a very problematic position to take in a number of ways. To some extent, the reason is that this position is unscientific with no accessible data to validate some of its argumentations. The notion or claim that one can identify the hand of Mark in the form of the text we have is also an audacious exercise. The biggest problem with this is that one should be careful when assuming the existence of a tradition and making claims that seem to suggest certainties based on a tradition that cannot be proven scientifically. These hypothetical positions from early-form critics can, however, be useful as aiding tools even though they cannot scientifically be proven.

Breytenbach (2019:3–11) suggests what he believes to be plausible pillars for the investigation of the influences behind the text of Mark. These plausible pillars are in fact based on the historical evidence that can be accessed behind the form of the existing Markan text. He argues that these pillars can make a strong case for the shaping stratum of the PN in Mark. Some of these evidences are clearly supported or rather suggested by the existing form of the Markan text itself from within the PN. For instance, Mark 15:1ff notes that Jesus was executed under Pilate, an assertion also stated by Tacitus. This concurs with the incident of the crucifixion in Mark and with the assertions made by one of the earliest Christian thinkers, the apostle Paul. In his earliest writings, Paul made this claim that 'Jesus Christ' died for the people (1 Th 5:10). Similarly, he told the Corinthians that while he

was among them, he resolved to know nothing except to proclaim Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 1:18, 2:1–5). Obviously, the death of Jesus was interpreted as the dying of Christ. The tight connection of the Christ designation with dying, respectively, the being-crucified of Jesus of Nazareth, requires that we take a closer look at his execution.

In Roman crucifixions, there had to be a trial. The Romans executed runaway slaves, traitors and those who committed treason against the Roman authorities. So, the question is this: On what charge did they execute the Christ? Here, the mutual memory of the faction of Jesus, as evidenced in Mark 15:26, is undisputed. Pilate had the *αἰτία*, the rationale for his conviction, written on a piece of wood with the inscription 'Ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων'. Based on this charge, the Markan text takes the position that Jesus of Nazareth had committed a political crime under the Roman Empire, the punishment for which was crucifixion, as Collins (1994:487) notes. Furthermore, when one considers the style in Mark's PN, it looks the same as other Gospel's PNs.

Again, another important observation is the fact that the Markan PN is interspersed with remarkable supplementary information and theological interpretations. In this light, the question is whether these Psalms can help us to go behind the Markan text. That does not help us either. Possibly, if one assumes that the Romans were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus, then one can, regardless of theological exegesis and dramatisation of many of the episodes, still recognise the basic sequence of events, which, in the current story of the Markan passion account, end in execution by crucifixion. These historical attestations might help us to acknowledge the complexities in the search for the shaping stratum of Mark's passion account.

Conclusion

This study has shown that form critics have proposed various possibilities in terms of the processes behind the making of Mark's passion account. Such diverse hypothetical theories have been problematic as they are all based on an assumed tradition that cannot be proven. Contrary to this approach, this paper has attempted to argue that the historical attestations from the text of Mark and outside of it can aid a modern reader to go behind the Markan PN to get some data for the shaping stratum of Mark's passion account. However, we have noticed the vital role that the Greco-Roman and Jewish literature played in shaping the theological themes in the Markan PN. Therefore, it seems best to consider these elements as vital features that the evangelists utilised as creative authors to communicate their own theological intent.

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M.H. is the sole author of this research article.

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