

TEKALIGN DUGUMA NEGEWO

Identity Formation and the Gospel of Matthew

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament
2. Reihe*

Mohr Siebeck

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A Socio-Narrative Reading

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Preface

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Introduction

The Identity-Forming Role of Matthew's Gospel

This book focuses on the role of the Gospel of Matthew in forming the identity of an ideal reader's community.¹ By undertaking a "socio-narrative reading" of selected accounts, it emphasises the role of the inclusion of positively characterised individual non-Judean² characters, such as the four non-Judeans in the genealogy account (Matt. 1:1–17), the Magi (Matt. 2:1–12), the centurion (Matt. 8:5–13), and the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21–28), and the stereotypical negative depiction of non-Judeans in Jesus' teaching (e.g., Matt. 8:28–34; 27:1–6; 27:62–66; 27:27 – 28:15) in shaping the identity of the community.

Since the Enlightenment period, the focus of Gospels studies has been on their historical context. Before the 1970s, historical approaches were primarily used for investigating their sources, form, messages, and the historical situations in which they were written.³ These investigations, however, mostly ignored the social dimensions of the text itself.⁴ Instead, they mostly explored issues surrounding the Matthean community or church⁵ and, for example, tried to address the issue of the anti-Semitic tendency of the First Gospel.⁶ Though

¹ The "ideal readers' community" in this book is the phrase used to designate the first-century group of people who read, grasped, and accepted the ideology propagated by the Gospel of Matthew as it was intended by the implied author in the narrative. The ideal readers' community is not considered as a replacement for Israel but rather a new group of people as the reconstituted Israel, which founded itself on Israel's tradition that permitted non-Judeans to be part of their community and to share in the messianic blessings. However, this community is not necessarily a reflection of the existing community; it could be, but it is an imagined/proposed community.

² The terms 'Judean' and 'non-Judean' are used to make a clear ethnic distinction between *Ιουδαῖος* and *ἔθνος*, which most scholars translate as 'Jews' and 'Gentiles' respectively. See S. Mason, 'Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History', *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007), 457–512; D. R. Schwartz, "'Judaean' or 'Jew'?" How Should We Translate *IOUDAIOS* in Josephus?', in J. Frey, D. Schwartz, and S. Grippentrog, eds., *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 3–27.

³ M. W. G. Stibbe, *The Gospel of John as Literature: an Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (New York: Brill, 1993), 5.

⁴ J. H. Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 18.

⁵ J. P. A. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Vol. 1, The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 625; G. N. Stanton, *The Interpretation of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

⁶ J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Study of the Synoptic Gospels: New Approaches and Outlooks*

some scholars explored the association of the Matthean community with its contemporary Jewish counterparts, they mainly focussed on the Christian-Jewish conflict and the polemic nature of the Gospel of Matthew.⁷ Their studies also concentrated on certain passages, such as Matthew 23 and 27:25. During the last few decades, interest has grown in cross-disciplinary approaches that explore the conflict of the Matthean community with its Jewish parent body.⁸

More recent Matthean studies, specifically those that have attempted to utilise a socio-historical⁹ or a social-scientific¹⁰ approach, have made a start towards identifying the social situations behind various writings and not just the conflict between them. These studies provide significant insight to scholars about the social context of the New Testament texts.

The identity of the first readers of each Gospel has also captured the scholarly imagination for decades. It has been a while since Graham Stanton identified the core of the issues behind Matthean studies:

Was the evangelist himself a Jew or a Gentile? Were his Christian readers mainly Jews or Gentiles? Were Matthew's communities still under strong pressure from the neighboring synagogues? Or was Jews' persecution of Christians a matter of past history for the evangelist's communities?¹¹

David Sim believes the issues identified by Stanton still draw scholars' attention, saying that the issue of "whether this Christian community was still within Judaism or had separated from it, both physically or ideologically, has intensified considerably and is now without question the dominant theme in Matthean studies."¹²

Past Matthean studies indicate two main theories regarding to whom the Gospel was addressed. The first, promoted by scholars such as Anthony J. Saldarini¹³ and David Sim,¹⁴ argues for the Judeans of this community as its

(London: G. Chapman, 1965), 667–671; D. E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23*, (Leiden: Brill, 1979).

⁷ Stanton, *The Interpretation of Matthew*, 264–268.

⁸ D. L. Balch, ed., *Social History of the Matthean Community. Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991).

⁹ B. J. Malina and J. J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 154–193.

¹⁰ Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?*, 8.

¹¹ G. N. Stanton, 'Introduction: Matthew's Gospel in Recent Scholarship', in *The Interpretation of Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 2.

¹² D. C. Sim, 'Matthew: The Current State of Research', in E. M. Runesson and A. Becker, eds., *Mark and Matthew I: Comparative Readings: Understanding the Earliest Gospels in their First-Century Settings* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 6.

¹³ Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago), 1994.

¹⁴ D. C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 5.

intended readers. The second suggestion is advocated by Matthean scholars like Graham Stanton and Donald A. Hagner,¹⁵ who contend that it was a community detached from its mother religion, Judaism, with a clear Christian nature.

From the mid-twentieth century many scholars approached the Gospels as they did the letters of Paul: as documents written for specific, demarcated communities. This, in turn, produced studies that sought to read the Gospels as veiled descriptions of their authorial communities. This interpretive lens, reading the Gospel as a narrative both about, and responding to, the needs of the authorial community, colours most of Matthean scholarship. The primary focus of the scholars who have dealt with the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community is the association between this community and the formative Judaism.¹⁶

Some scholars have used social identity theory to study the relationship between Judaism and the Matthean community, but their endeavour is compromised, because applying social identity theory to a reconstructed community out of which the Gospel emerged is hampered by the fact that there is no consensus among scholars about the nature of this community. Over the past few decades, a significant number of Matthean scholars have cautioned against imaginative portraits of the 'Matthean community', contending that it is a product of too much guesswork. Therefore, they argue, this quest will never be concluded satisfactorily.¹⁷

Richard Bauckham further questions the validity of the quest for a specific community for each Gospel assumed by modern scholarship. He challenges the notion that each Gospel was written to a specific community or reflects the social situation of a specific community.¹⁸ Instead, Bauckham claims that "the Gospels were written with the intention that they should circulate around all the churches."¹⁹ Based on the accepted assumption of Markan priority and Matthew's and Luke's redaction of it, and also the nature of the Gospels themselves, he contends that each Gospel has an indefinite implied readership and that the authors anticipated that the Gospels would circulate among the Christian community throughout the ancient Mediterranean world.²⁰ As this

¹⁵ D. A. Hagner, 'Matthew: Apostate, Reformer, Revolutionary?', *New Testament Studies* 49.2 (2003), 194.

¹⁶ D. C. Sim, 'The Social Setting of the Matthean Community: New Paths for an Old Journey', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 57 (2001), 269.

¹⁷ R. J. Bauckham, 'For Whom Were Gospels Written?', in R. Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 9–48; cf. R. Burridge, 'About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences', in R. Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians*, 113–146.

¹⁸ Bauckham, 'For Whom Were Gospels Written?', 9–48; cf. Burridge, 'About People, by People, for People', 113–146.

¹⁹ R. J. Bauckham, 'Introduction', in Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians*, 2.

²⁰ Bauckham, 'For Whom Were Gospels Written?', 12–13.

study will argue later, this challenge does not affect this project, which is concerned with the identity-forming role of the Gospels. Even though the ancient biographical nature of the Gospels shows that they were not written to particular communities, this does not necessarily imply that the author of Matthew's Gospel did not have a targeted audience or that he simply wrote it for a random audience. Rather, this research assumes the Gospel of Matthew was written for a wider audience in the first century. The author of Matthew assumed that some of his readers, the ideal readers' community, would be able to understand his Gospel and it would have a certain formative impact on them. The impact was not intended for a specific, isolated community, but for all its readers, who could have lived in more than one locality but faced the same issues. Therefore, this study assumes that the Gospel of Matthew was written to address issues current at the time of its composition.

The difference between the approach followed in this book and the one advocated by the historical-critical method, is that the latter begins by assuming the existence of a specific community in a certain locality, in Matthew's case, the Matthean community, and that the Gospel reflects the historical and social situation of the particular community to which it was addressed. Therefore, it accepts that by reading a Gospel, it is possible to study the community to which the Gospel was addressed. In contrast, the approach of this book assumes the Gospels were addressed to the wider community of first-century Christians in general and that the Gospels have a general identity-forming role. Thus, it does not postulate that the Gospel of Matthew reflects an already existing community. Instead, it attempts to investigate how the author constructed his narrative to form the identity of the ideal readers' community in general to become a new community. It suggests that social identity theory can be utilised to examine this identity formation process.

Baker notes the importance of this identity-forming role of the text.²¹ It is particularly relevant when we consider that the New Testament texts were generally also intended to have an educational and communal orientation role.²² In this regard, Burridge demonstrates how the Gospel forms the identity of its community by demonstrating its similarity with the ancient Greco-Roman biography.²³ In the manner of ancient biographers, the Gospel writers presented Jesus as a prototype or model to be followed. Therefore, the Gospels have a role in forming the identity of the communities that read it.

²¹ C. A. Baker, 'Early Christian Identity Formation: From Ethnicity and Theology to Socio-Narrative Criticism', *Currents in Biblical Research* 2.9 (2011), 228–237.

²² W. Carter, 'Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew', *Biblical Interpretation* 16 (2008), 511–513; G. D. Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Edinburgh: Oxford University Press, 1946), 59–100.

²³ Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1992.

Building upon the previous research conducted by Bauckham and other contemporary Matthean scholars, this book hopes to address a gap in research related to the ideological intentions of the author of the Gospel of Matthew. The book will argue that the Gospel's message shaped the social identity of its ideal readers' community, that is, various first-century Christian communities. It argues further that the Gospel of Matthew uses various non-Judean characters to do this. Thus, this book contributes to Matthean scholarship by investigating the way the implied author used non-Judean characters to form the identity of the ideal readers' community. It uses a socio-narrative reading tool (see Chapter 2).

This book specifically looks at how the implied author of the Gospel of Matthew used his writing to form the identity of the ideal readers' communities, which are postulated to have been first-century Christian communities. By investigating in particular the inclusion of non-Judean characters in this Gospel narrative, the research aims to show how the implied author sought to shape the identity of the ideal readers' community and how the story is intended to be received by the ideal readers' community. The book will attempt to address the following problems:

The Gospel of Matthew characterises non-Judeans both positively and negatively, and this is often seen by Matthean scholars as reflecting the tension between Judeans and non-Judeans. For centuries, the portrayal of non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative has been puzzling Matthean scholars and many attempts have been made to understand whether the author viewed them positively or negatively. Though there have been many studies from different perspectives on the non-Judean characters presented in the Gospel of Matthew, so far no study has specifically addressed the role of these characters in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community. Thus, the non-Judean characters in the Gospel of Matthew have not been thoroughly studied from an identity-forming perspective.

Most of the research conducted on the Gospel of Matthew in general, as well as on non-Judean characters in particular, has been from the perspective of historical-critical, literary-critical, socio-scientific, narrative-critical, and other reading methods. The methodologies employed in past research focus either on the historicity and social situations in which the text was produced, or on the narrative world within the text, to find the meaning of the text. They do not explicate how the text was intended to be received by its implied readers. Therefore, a methodology that fills this gap is necessary.

Until now, most studies have focused on the non-Judean characters as reflecting the actual composition of the Matthean community. The present research contends that they were included by Matthew to shape the identity of new, potential communities, comprised of Judeans and non-Judeans. It does not assume that these communities already existed when Matthew wrote his Gospel.

The purpose of the book is to fill the knowledge gap regarding the role of the non-Judean characters in the Matthean narrative in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community. Most of the previous studies conducted on the non-Judean characters in the Matthean narrative address issues related to the extension of the mission to non-Judeans, or attempt to reconstruct the existing community behind the Gospel of Matthew. This book, however, will argue that the inclusion of the non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative has an identity-forming role. It will investigate the role of the Gospel of Matthew, particularly stories related to non-Judeans, in redefining the identity of the beneficiaries of the messianic blessings – the people of God who are depicted in the Gospel of Matthew as reconstituted Israel. This is a potential community that accepts the ideology propagated by the implied author of Matthew's Gospel. This book, therefore, will contribute to filling this lacuna in Matthean scholarship.

Furthermore, it aims to solve the tension created by the implied author in the positive and negative depictions of non-Judeans by showing that this is the author's means of forming the identity of the ideal reader's community. Most scholars' studies in the past have considered the characterisation of non-Judeans as either a reflection of the reconstructed Matthean community or the author's attitude towards the non-Judeans. However, this book will argue that both the positive and negative characterisation of non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative are literary tools used by the implied author to form the social identity of the ideal readers' community as reconstituted Israel and beneficiaries of the messianic benefits.

Though Matthean scholarship has recognised the representational role of the non-Judean characters in the narrative, it lacks a theoretical framework by which it reaches its conclusion. Therefore, this research attempts to make a significant contribution to filling this lacuna in Matthean scholarship by providing a theoretical framework that helps the scholarly community to better grasp and explicate the representational role of non-Judean characters in constructing the identity of the readers' community. I will argue that Barthes' semiological reading method provides a theoretical framework through which we can understand the representational role of positively depicted non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative. This theoretical framework will emerge from the reading methodology, which this book describes as a "socio-narrative reading" that will be developed by merging narrative criticism, a semiological reading of the narrative, and a socio-scientific reading of the text.

Thus, as no specific study has to date focused on how the author of the Gospel utilised the non-Judean characters in the Matthean narrative to shape the identity of its ideal readers' community as an envisioned first-century Christian community, the research will also contribute to filling this void in Matthean scholarship through a socio-narrative reading. The book presupposes the following:

1. The stories told in the Gospel of Matthew are historical narratives in the sense of reporting past events as understood by the author. However, they do not merely tell the reader what happened, but rather aim to create something in the present. The Gospel of Matthew thus has an impact on the ideal readers.
2. The Gospels are ideological documents that were carefully constructed to shape the identity of the addressees.
3. The Gospel of Matthew, as is the case with all narratives, is a symbolic act that aimed to provide a solution for the social and cultural problems of the intended readers.²⁴
4. The Gospel of Matthew was written to a wider audience of the Christian community in the first century with the intent of having a formative impact on its readers.
5. The author of the Gospel of Matthew considered the members of the ideal readers' community to which the Gospel was addressed as a true expression of Israel. He, therefore, constructed their identity using the Judean traditions. However, in this community, contrary to contemporary Judean communities, non-Judeans were included.²⁵
6. Though the research is not directly concerned with the dating of the Gospel of Matthew, it assumes that it was written within the first-century socio-cultural milieu. It accepts the presence of uncertainty in this milieu regarding the acceptance of non-Judeans. In this era, the fate of the non-Judeans upon the coming of the Messiah was disputed. Important issues were whether they would be included in the kingdom he would bring, who would be members of the kingdom, and who would benefit from the blessings in the kingdom. Therefore, this book will assume the Gospel of Matthew was written to address some of the issues in the first-century context.

This book wishes to further the thesis that in the context of the first century, when there was an expectation that non-Judeans would pass through a proselytisation process to be partakers of the messianic blessings,²⁶ the fate of non-Judeans was disputed regarding their relationship to the Messiah, who came to restore Israel. In this context, the implied author on the one hand characterises

²⁴ F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1985); R. Wess, 'Narrative As a Socially Symbolic Act: The Example of Clarissa', *Comparative Studies* 5 (1987), 69–78.

²⁵ This study uses the term community to refer to the group to which the Gospel was addressed – a group portrayed by the implied author in terms of trans-ethnic identity and depicted as neither Judean nor non-Judean. However, the author defined their identity in terms of Judean traditions.

²⁶ Because it was assumed that the coming of the Messiah was for Judeans, the messianic blessings were seen as being only for those who belonged to their group. If non-Judeans wished to partake in these messianic blessings, they had to become part of this group by undergoing a conversion ritual.

non-Judeans stereotypically in a negative way in Jesus' teaching. This negative stereotypical depiction of non-Judeans is exemplified through the implied author's negative characterisation of individual non-Judeans, such as the Gadarenes, Pilate, and the Roman soldiers. On the other hand, the author also positively characterised non-Judean characters, such as the four non-Judeans in the genealogy account, the Magi, the centurion, and the Canaanite woman, to show that non-Judeans were authorised beneficiaries of the messianic benefits. Therefore, this book will argue that while the stereotypically negative characterisation of non-Judeans in the Matthean narrative is aimed at forming the outside boundary of the ideal readers' community, these positively depicted narrative characters are not just examples or a foreshadowing of the inclusion of non-Judeans into the community, neither are they the reason for the inclusion of non-Judeans into the community. Their function in the narrative exceeds justifying the presence of non-Judeans in the community. Rather, they represent the full realisation of the messianic expectations; they are the means through which the implied author reshaped the identity of the community that would benefit from the messianic blessings. They are the ideological manifesto of the implied author. If non-Judeans are also the rightful beneficiaries of the messianic benefits, the beneficiaries' identity is clearly redefined, the identity of the community is reshaped, and the relationship between Judeans and non-Judeans is negotiated. Consequently, the implied author used these characters to form the identity of the ideal readers' community.

This book will make use of a new approach that can be described as a "socio-narrative reading". It is an integrated approach that merges socio-scientific criticism and narrative criticism using sociological theory. It will specifically use social identity construction theory, narrative theory, Barthes' semiological reading theory, Burton Mack's mythmaking, and Seymour Chatman's open character narrative theory, which will be discussed in the second chapter of this book. Narrative criticism will help with the study of the narrative world of the non-Judean characters and of how the implied author characterised them in the narrative; socio-scientific criticism and its social identity construction theory will be used as a heuristic tool to assist with analysing the social norms of the narrative world; and the structural reading of myth, specifically Barthes' semiological reading, will clarify how the implied author intended those stories to be received by the implied readers. The above-mentioned three reading methods together will put us in a better position to see how the implied author used the non-Judean characters in the narrative to shape the identity of the ideal readers' community (see Chapter 2).

The Matthean narrative includes various non-Judean individuals or groups, including those in the genealogy account (Matt. 1:1–17), the Magi (Matt. 2:1–12), a centurion (Matt. 8:5–13), the Gadarenes (Matt. 8:32–34), the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21–28), Pilate (Matt. 27:1–6; 27:62–66), and a group of Roman soldiers (Matt. 27:27 – 28:15). The focus of this book will be on analysing

the above-mentioned texts in which individual non-Judean figures are mentioned and passages in which the author explicitly or implicitly attributed certain characteristics to the non-Judeans (i.e., Matt. 5:47; 6:7; 6:32; 18:17; and 20:19), which I will argue have a bearing on the identity formation of the ideal readers' community. There are other non-Judean characters in the Gospel of Matthew, in the story of the centurion and the soldiers with him at the cross (Matt. 27:54), which I argue have a similar effect²⁷ on implied readers as the other positively characterised non-Judeans mentioned in the Matthean narrative. However, the story is not linked to either their being beneficiaries of the messianic blessings or being part of the community of which the members are legitimate beneficiaries of the messianic blessing. Therefore, it will not be addressed in this book. Other passages in the Gospel of Matthew are linked in one way or another to non-Judean characters, such as Matt. 10:5–6 and 28:16–20. As a significant amount of work has been done on these passages by Matthean scholars from the perspective of the identity of the community, I will not deal with these passages.

²⁷ I will argue that this story has a similar role in forming the identity of the ideal readers' community. Though the story of the centurion and the soldiers with him in Matt. 27:54, according to Barthes' first order semiological reading, has meaning related to their acknowledgement of Jesus' messianic identity, I argue that the second order meaning of the story is related to forming the identity of the ideal readers' community. For, as I will argue in Chapter 4, the non-Judeans are depicted in Jesus' teaching as those who did not acknowledge the power of God; however, these soldiers, who were meant to guard Jesus, after seeing the whole incident, acknowledged and testified to the messianic identity of Jesus. Therefore, the secondary meaning of the story is that the non-Judeans will acknowledge and testify to the messianic identity of Jesus like the centurion and the soldiers with him. This is the significance of the story. Thus, the implied author used this signification of the story of the centurion and the soldiers, who acted contrary to the general characterisation of non-Judeans, to form the identity of the ideal readers' community. That is, not only Judeans but also non-Judeans acknowledged the messianic identity of Jesus. However, this story is different from the other stories in which non-Judeans are positively characterised (see Chapter 5) in the sense that the story was not written in the context of their benefiting from or being legitimate beneficiaries of the messianic blessings. Therefore, this story is not included in the study.

Chapter 1

History of Research

A project like this, which deals with the role of the text in shaping the identity of the reader, has to commence with the questions whether such a reader can be identified, the genre of the literature, and the purpose of the literature. Matthean scholars have put enormous effort into seeking answers to these questions. However, the efforts are mainly related to the assumed community behind the production of the Gospel of Matthew, which enables scholars to construct a historical matrix against which they might read the Gospel. Thus, a significant amount of research has been done on the Gospel of Matthew to analyse the nature of the “Matthean community” from the perspectives of historical criticism, literary criticism, socio-historical and socio-scientific reading methods, and narrative criticism.

Before briefly overviewing the different methodologies used in Matthean studies, I will trace some of the work that has been done on the Gospel of Matthew with regard to identity formation, before surveying major methodologies that have a direct or indirect impact on the study of the community to which the Gospel was addressed.

1.1 History of Research on Identity Formation and Matthew’s Gospel

Matthean scholars have made various attempts to determine the role of the Gospel in shaping the identity of the Matthean community. John K. Riches, for example, considers the “Gospels as evidence for a Christian sense of identity”.¹ In the first chapter of his book he addresses the issue of “identity and change” with the turn of the era, kinship, and sacred space as key identity factors.² In Chapter 2 he describes Jewish identity in relationship with kinship, decadence, and sacred space in the Mediterranean cities.³ He then discusses the topic of identity formation in the Gospel of Mark, before moving on to address the issue of self-identification in Matthew in the light of emerging rabbinic Judaism. He

¹ J. K. Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies: Identity Formation in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 1–20.

² *Ibid.*, 1–20.

³ *Ibid.*, 21–68.

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