

Rereading the Past

Memory and Identity in Post-Communist Croatia and the Genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship of groups and individuals to their own history is a complex process. As much as “we investigate and analyze our past in order to understand who we are in the present” (Williams 2002: 105–6), our understanding of who we are in the present influences the way we investigate and analyze our past. Moreover, we have access to the past only as the past has been remembered by various groups and individuals. As we access the available historical records, we engage in the process of their reinterpretation, especially as we assess their significance for the present. This assessment includes not only an evaluation of the existing evidence but also a selection of the data that will be moved to the center of our historical consciousness and that will be consequently pushed to its margins.

In stable environments, we might not always be aware of such selection and reevaluation of the past. But in times of transition, when the old ways of life and understandings of the world are being replaced by new ones, the selective task inherent in historiographical enterprise is more noticeable (Hajdinjak 2006: 2). I come from Croatia, a country that has recently gone through a transition from Communism to democracy. Although I now live and work in the United States, I continue to take a keen interest in social and political changes that are taking place in my home country. This interest makes me more attentive to other transitional processes and the role that the reinterpretation of the past plays in them. Jesus’ genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew is one such text, one that bears witness to a transition from early Judaism to emerging Christianity.

Its placement at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, and eventually at the beginning of the New Testament canon, reinforces its transitional character. It functions as a bridge between the old and the new, and it accomplishes this task through the rereading of the past.

In this article, I explore the Matthean genealogy of Jesus from the perspective of the insights gained in post-Communist Croatia, particularly with regard to the transformation of its collective memory and identity. The categories of social and collective memory are slowly, but persistently, making inroads into Gospel studies (Schröter 1997: 462–66; Kirk and Thatcher 2005; Horsley, Draper, and Foley 2006; Barton, Stuckenbruck, and Wold 2007). In his study of the role of social memory in the Matthean community, Samuel Byrskog calls attention to “the dynamics involved as the early Christians struggled to find their identity in relation to the history which they cherished and performed” (Byrskog 2006: 320–21). He concludes that the retelling or reoralization of the Markan narrative created the sense of belonging and internal cohesion of the group (Byrskog 2006: 335–36). The topic of this article is somewhat different. Rather than asking about how the social context of the Matthean community shaped its memory of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection, I wish to focus on the question of how the Matthean community remembered its distant past, that is, the history of Israel and its relation to the birth of Jesus. Such activity presumes the availability of various, primarily written, records and an evaluative process of their selection. Jesus' genealogy, strategically placed at the beginning of Matthew's narrative about his life, death, and resurrection, offers a window into the way the collective memory of Israel's past shaped the identity of the Matthean community.

I will begin my analysis by offering a brief survey of various strategies of rereading the past that have been employed in post-Communist Croatia. I believe that this context offers a modern, albeit odd, analogy to the strategies of rereading the past practiced in the Matthean community. I will then turn to the reinterpretation of Israel's history in the Matthean genealogy. Special attention will be given to the question of how the memory of several extraordinary women who are mentioned in the genealogy shapes the identity of the Matthean community.

MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN POST-COMMUNIST CROATIA

Croatia, like other post-Communist countries, experienced a rapid transformation of its social and political structures. The modification of shared memory played a significant part in the transition from Communism to

democracy. Such intentional revision of group memory was nothing new for people in the Balkans. During the Communist regime, state propaganda officially “erased” the memory of ethnic tensions between various national groups living in former Yugoslavia and imposed the memory of “Brotherhood and Unity” as a universally accepted truth. During the wars of the 1990s, unresolved ethnic tensions among Serbs, Croats, and Muslims were mercilessly exploited by various nationalistic leaders with the help of resurrected memories of each group’s victimization by other group(s).

After the war, Croatian leaders engaged in a radical reevaluation of the past, in order to modify the common perception of national belonging and identity. This reinterpretation of the collective heritage included setting aside existing memories and substituting new, more appropriate memories for them. These new traditions, as Marko Hajdinjak notes, are typically based on “traditions popular before the regime just overthrown took power, preferably in the society’s ‘Golden Age.’ Thus all traces of the *ancien regime* are erased and the successor legitimized” (Hajdinjak 2006: 3). Hajdinjak adds that

members do not have to perceive the myth to be historically accurate. It is enough that they accept the content and the message of the myth and the myth will successfully perform its main task of establishing the connection between members of the society. . . . Myths and mythic histories bring the collective heritage back to life and are therefore essential in identifying “who we are.” (Hajdinjak 2006: 3)¹

As a result, a new symbolic world was created with the purpose of legitimizing the new regime and making a clear break between Communist and democratic Croatian national identity. This was accomplished through a variety of means, such as the creation of new myths, the renaming of streets and city squares, the erection of new monuments, the rewriting of history textbooks, and public recognition of the victims of Communism.

One of the most popular ways, especially in the 1990s, of using certain historical events for the purpose of shaping national identity was to present specific periods of Croatia’s heroic past as the golden age. Anthony Smith explains that the past events selected to serve this function must be authentic, inspirational, and repeatable. They must not only provide the citizens with a sense of national pride but also inspire them to act in a certain way in order to re-create the past glory (Smith 1997: 55–59). For example, in his speech to the Croatian Parliament delivered on December 22, 1990, President Tudjman

emphasized that the Croatian state had never ceased to exist from its formation as an independent medieval kingdom until it became a part of the kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918. He also drew a sharp distinction between the West-oriented Croats and the half-Oriental Serbs (Trifunovska 1994). Likewise, the Croatian constitution links the declaration of Croatian sovereignty to a “millennial national identity of the Croatian nation and the continuity of its statehood” for more than 1,300 years.²

Another way of shaping national identity in post-Communist Croatia was through the renaming of streets and squares. For example, “The Square of the Victims of Fascism” became “The Square of the Croatian Heroes.” A large statue of *Ban* (“governor”) Josip Jelačić on a horse, originally erected in 1866 by the Austrian authorities at the central square of the city of Zagreb and then removed in 1947 by Yugoslav Communist authorities, was returned to its original location in 1990 by the new Croatian government as a memorial of Croatian national identity. The square itself, originally named after Ban Jelačić, was renamed during the Communist regime as “Republic Square.” With the reinstallation of the Ban Jelačić statue in 1990, the name of the square was again changed to its former designation, “Ban Jelačić Square.” Because of Jelačić’s antirevolutionary stance during the 1848 revolution in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Communist regime denounced him as an Austrian collaborator. Yet, because of his desire—even if miscalculated—to maintain Croatian autonomy, in post-Communist Croatia his statue at the main city square became a memorial to all past longings for independence and a powerful symbol of their realization in the present (Tanner 1997: 90–93). New holidays such as “Independence Day” and “Statehood Day” replaced the old ones, such as “Republic Day,” “Fighter’s Day,” and “Day of Uprising in Croatia,” which celebrated the formation of Yugoslavia and antifascist resistance during World War II.

These changes in the perception of the Croatian distant and recent past have also affected historiography. Some Croatian historians, such as Neven Budak, believe that “the communist period influenced historical writing only marginally” so that no significant revision is needed (Budak 2004: 128). Others, such as Jure Krišto, argue that history books need to be revised in light of Croatian independence (Krišto 2001: 165–89). These differences in the assessment of Croatian historiography are partially the result of an ongoing competition between the Department of History, whose members are sometimes accused of having Communist backgrounds, and the Croatian Institute of History, which is sometimes regarded as a center of nationalism and historical revisionism (Budak 2004: 155–58). As time passes, however, it is

becoming increasingly clear that different voices in the interpretation of history are welcome. While in the 1990s the political abuse of historiography was a common occurrence, Croatian historians are now more aware of the danger of interpreting history for purely ideological and/or political purposes (Senjković 2002).

One aspect of the rereading of the Croatian past is particularly worth mentioning: the rehabilitation and new appreciation of the victims of Communism. The case of Croatian archbishop (later cardinal) Aloysius Stepinac illustrates the complexity of such a process.³ During World War II, Archbishop Stepinac helped numerous Jews and other victims of fascism escape Nazi persecution, either by direct action or by instructions given to Croatian clergymen. Yet, the new Communist government under Josip Broz Tito used Stepinac's initial tolerance of the Ustashi-led Independent State of Croatia during World War II as a pretext for accusing him of collaboration with the Nazis and complicity in the forced conversion of Orthodox Serbs to Catholicism. Despite objections from the pope and numerous members of the Jewish community, Stepinac was tried and then sentenced to sixteen years of imprisonment. Because of his poor health, he was moved in 1951 from prison to house arrest. The following year, he was declared cardinal by Pope Pius XII. He died in 1960. During the entire Communist period, he was always described as a Nazi collaborator. At the same time, however, an alternative memory of his role in World War II—one that stressed his resistance to fascism and cherished him as a martyr of Communism—was kept alive by the Catholic Church. In post-Communist Croatia, this alternative memory acquired significant visibility. In 1992, the Croatian Sabor passed a declaration that condemned the court decision against Stepinac and claimed that the true reasons for the trial and eventual verdict were Stepinac's criticism of Communist crimes and his refusal to allow the Catholic Church in Croatia to break with Rome. In 1998, Pope John Paul II declared him a martyr and beatified him. In 2007, the municipality of Marija Bistrica began to build pilgrimage paths linking places significant to his life. In the same year, the Aloysius Stepinac Museum was opened in Zagreb. In February 2010, on the fiftieth anniversary of Stepinac's death, several Masses were celebrated in his memory: in Zagreb, in Krašić, and in Rome.

One of the most helpful theoretical models for understanding the changes in post-Communist Croatia pertaining to the perception of its own past is provided through the concepts of social, collective, and cultural memory as developed by Maurice Halbwachs and Jan and Aleida Assmann (Halbwachs 1925; 1992; Assmann 2006b: 1–30; 2006a: 67–82). Halbwachs claimed that

memory is socially conditioned and socially mediated. Jan Assmann, who further refined the communicative aspect of social memory, explained that

for a functioning communicative memory, forgetting is just as vital as remembering. This is why it is not “photographic.” Remembering means pushing other things into the background, making distinctions, obliterating many things in order to shed light on others. This is what brings horizon and perspective into individual memory spaces, and these perspectives are emotionally mediated. (Assmann 2006b: 3)

Yet, on a communal level, it is not sufficient to speak merely about the social or communicative aspect of individual memory, but also about the memory that provides a collective sense of identity to the members of a given group. Assmann calls this memory “collective memory,” and points out that this type of memory “is particularly susceptible to politicized forms of remembering.” Unlike social memory, which develops and then disappears gradually, collective memory is a willed memory, “a projection on the part of the collective that wishes to remember and of the individual who remembers in order to belong” (Assmann 2006b: 7). This endeavor consists of an examination of cultural traditions, symbols, and myths, including the great stories of the past that can be reactivated or deactivated intentionally in a group’s collective memory. Not surprisingly, then, Assmann describes this memory as a “memory of the will” and further qualifies it as “cultural memory.” Its repertoire is not limited to a horizontal memory that encompasses only two to three generations, but includes long-term traditions stretching vertically through multiple generations, which are preserved in all kinds of historical records (Assmann 2006b: 7–8). In written cultures, this repository of the past includes numerous written records that can be revisited at will, allowing a selection between the information that is needed and the information that is no longer needed in a given moment. Aleida Assmann calls the information about the past that is needed in the present “functional memory” and the information about the past that is no longer needed “stored memory,” and alleges that constant shifting between the two is “the precondition of the possibility of change and renewal” (Assmann 1999: 136).

The concept of collective/cultural memory is easily applicable to the reinterpretation of history in post-Communist Croatia. Typically, the individuals who are brought to collective consciousness are those who struggled, even if unsuccessfully, to achieve Croatian independence. What

makes them especially interesting for the present study is the fact that some of them, such as Aloysius Stepinac, have been, and remain, quite controversial in the wider public perception. Yet there is a persistent effort to clear them of false accusations, to bypass their potentially embarrassing deeds, and to present them as Croatian heroes. Alongside the public endeavors to elevate selected personalities and events from Croatia's glorious past to functional memory are systematic efforts to forget Croatia's most immediate past—the one under the Communist regime. The events that took place during the Communist era are, in terms of collective memory, relegated to stored memory. What shapes collective consciousness and identity is a reactivated memory of the events that led to Croatian independence, not the memory of the events that detracted from this goal. One can therefore say that the rereading of the past in modern Croatia takes place from the perspective of an ultimate realization of its ancient dreams.

MEMORY OF THE PAST IN THE MATTHEAN GENEALOGY

I wish to propose that a similar understanding of history—one that rereads the past from the perspective of its ultimate realization in Jesus the Messiah—is operative in the Matthean genealogy of Jesus. Some interpreters presume that the primary purpose of the genealogy is to justify Jesus' questionable birth and claim to messiahship. Such apologetic aims are certainly suitable for polemical contexts, in which one group has to defend its truth claims against charges of distortion raised by a rival group. Indeed, in view of the tension, even hostility, between the Matthean community and an emerging rabbinic Judaism, these objectives cannot be excluded (Overman 1990: 72–149). It is, however, questionable whether sexual irregularities associated with the four women mentioned in the genealogy could really provide compelling arguments for Mary's defense in the controversies surrounding Jesus' birth. As several scholars have noted, it is more likely that they would have provoked such controversies rather than assuage them (Johnson 1969: 148; Harrington 1991a: 32; Levine 1998: 340). It is therefore arguable that the primary purpose of the Matthean genealogy is not to defend but to explain the past from the perspective of an already achieved goal. It is written for insiders, not outsiders, who share the conviction that their hope for a Davidic Messiah has finally been realized. In this role, the genealogy restructures collective memory by moving some individuals from Israel's past to the foreground, while pushing others to the background. With this, certain parts of Israel's history are moved to functional memory, while others are relegated to stored memory.

The above comments presume that Jesus' genealogy in Matt. 1:2-17 functions not only as his family tree but also as a mnemonic device that points to a larger narrative of Israel's past. Strictly speaking, the main task of genealogies, as a distinct literary genre, is to explain the origin of persons by providing their lineage. The Matthean genealogy belongs to a subgroup of linear genealogies, which link an individual to an earlier ancestor through a vertical list of names. Yet, unlike Jesus' genealogy in Luke 3:23-38, which exemplifies a pure form of linear genealogy, the Matthean genealogy contains several extraneous features that indicate an interest in more than mere ancestry. First, the genealogy is formally structured into three sections of equal length, each consisting of fourteen generations.⁴ Second, it follows the royal Davidic line, providing the list of David's ancestors in the first division, and the lists of his descendants in the second and third divisions. Third, the qualification "the king," added after David's name in Matt. 1:6, functions as a divider between the first and the second section, while the comments "at the time of the deportation to Babylon" (1:11) and "after the deportation to Babylon" (1:12) create a dividing line between the second and the third section. Fourth, most of the names that appear in the first and the second sections of the genealogy belong to prominent personalities from Israel's sacred history. It is, for example, difficult to imagine anyone familiar with Israel's Scripture who would not hear echoes of patriarchal narratives at the mention of the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or who would fail to recall David's rise to power and God's promise of the permanency of the Davidic dynasty at the mention of David's name. Fifth, the genealogy expands the straightforward vertical line of descendants by three horizontal extensions: Matt. 1:2 adds that Jacob was the father not only of Judah but also of his brothers, Matt. 1:3 adds that Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah, and Matt. 1:11 adds that Josiah was the father of Jechoniah and his brothers. These expansions indicate that Jesus belongs not only to a particular family but also to Israel as a nation. Sixth, four women are added to the list of Jesus' male ancestors. These women are not the well-known matriarchs of Israel's past, but are of a decidedly ambiguous reputation, either because of their irregular and potentially scandalous sexual unions or because of their non-Jewish origin. Finally, the genealogy ends with another woman, Mary, and the remark that she gave birth to Jesus, "who is called the Messiah." Each of these supplementary features contributes to the overall impression that the Matthean genealogy offers not only Jesus' lineage but also a distinctive reinterpretation of Israel's history (Smit 2010: 194; Nolland 1997: 529).

Matthew's interest in Israel's history is in continuity with biblical interest in history. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi explains:

The biblical appeal to remember . . . has little to do with curiosity about the past. Israel is told only that it must be a kingdom of priests and a holy people; nowhere is it suggested that it become a nation of historians. Memory is, by its nature, selective, and the demand that Israel remember is no exception. . . . The fact that history has meaning does not mean that everything that happened in history is meaningful or worthy of recollection. (Yerushalmi 1982: 10)

By the time of the writing of Matthew's Gospel, the accounts of the selected, and thus meaningful, events of Israel's past had become part of the sacred texts that had already achieved a relatively fixed form, as well as scriptural status. The literature produced in the Second Temple period and in early rabbinic Judaism indicates that Jews continued to interpret the stories of their sacred past. The New Testament authors engaged in a similar endeavor, as they tried to articulate the relationship of early Christian communities to their Jewish heritage. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus offers us a glimpse into the way his community reread the past. It selectively remembered those individuals and events that prefigured the appearance of Jesus. The central place in the genealogy belongs to Israel's and, after the schism, Judah's golden age, that is, the appearance and glory of the Davidic monarchy. The best-known kings from the Davidic line are evoked. Moreover, some adjustments are made, such as making Josiah the father of his grandson Jechoniah (Matt. 1:11), in order to make the total number fit the overall scheme of fourteen generations. Matthew is clearly not interested in producing comprehensive historiography but rather a selective memory of Israel's past. Equally central to his assessment of history is the loss of past glory. In the economy of words that characterizes the genealogical genre, Matthew's double mention of the deportation to Babylon (vv. 11-12) catches the reader's attention. In view of the prominence given to the Davidic monarchy, the mention of its demise raises a theological question that most likely underlies Matthew's summation of Israel's history: If God promised David an everlasting kingdom, why does it no longer exist? Matthew's answer is relatively simple: the disappearance of the Davidic monarchy was only temporary. God has remained faithful to his promises to David and has fulfilled them, once for all, in the appearance of Jesus, the Davidic Messiah.

WOMEN IN THE GENEALOGY AND THE IDENTITY
OF THE MATTHEAN COMMUNITY

The above conclusion must be qualified in light of one of the most striking features of the Matthean genealogy: the mention of five women, four from Israel's distant past and one from the community's recent experience. Even though women rarely appear in genealogies, they are sometimes included to clarify a particular genealogical line or to emphasize a person's distinguished birth. Neither of these reasons seems to be operative in the Matthean genealogy. The four women from Israel's distant past are associated with objectionable sexual behavior and/or perceived as gentiles. Tamar, either a Canaanite or an Aramean,⁵ dressed as a prostitute and seduced her father-in-law Judah in order to get pregnant. Rahab, a Canaanite, was a former prostitute.⁶ Ruth, a Moabite, enticed Boaz before he took her in marriage. The reference to Bathsheba, which identifies her as "the wife of Uriah," reminds the reader that she was wife of a foreign mercenary, a Hittite, when she committed adultery with David. Yet, none of this directly applies to the fifth woman, the mother of Jesus. She conceived a child without a male partner, and she was Jewish.

Various explanations have been offered for why these women are included. Some proposals seek to discover similarities between the first four women and Mary, while others relate specific traits that characterize them individually or as a group to the character of the Matthean community. Many scholars focus on the irregularities in these women's relationships and argue that they anticipate the irregularity in Mary's pregnancy. According to Peter-Ben Smit, who has offered the most recent version of this theory, the concept of "irregular relationships" enables scholars to describe the common denominator of all five women "in neutral terms" (Smit 2010: 194–95). A theological version of this explanation is that the irregular and potentially scandalous behavior of these women, especially their extraordinary initiative in overcoming various obstacles, demonstrates that God sometimes uses unconventional means to achieve his goals in this world—even as he did to bring about the birth of the promised Messiah (Waetjen 1976: 215–16; Davies and Allison 1988, 1:171–72; Brown 1999: 74). Jane Schaberg and Elaine Wainwright interpret the irregular relationships of the women in Matthew's genealogy as specific acts that endanger patriarchal structure (Schaberg 1990: 32–33; Wainwright 1991: 61–69, 156–71). Each woman takes steps outside of the legitimate patriarchal framework, which defines women in relation to men. Their actions are against the prevailing norms and thus subversive. Amy-Jill Levine, in turn, interprets the irregular relationships of the women in the genealogy in terms of the social categories of marginals and elites. Unlike the powerful males who fail to fulfill

their responsibilities in the salvation history, the women, a socioeconomically powerless group of characters, become the examples of “higher righteousness” demanded by Jesus in Matt. 5:20 (Levine 1988: 80–88). In contrast, scholars who focus on the ethnic background of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba emphasize that their gentile origin anticipates the inclusion of gentiles into Matthew’s predominantly Jewish Christian community (Johnson 1969: 153–55; Luz 2007: 84–85).

None of these explanations entirely satisfies. The differences among the women in the genealogy weigh against their similarities (Luz 2007: 84). A gentile origin of all four women is difficult to establish. To speak about their irregular relationships is too general. Only Tamar’s twins were conceived out of wedlock. Regardless of their questionable past, the other three women were married when they became pregnant with the children mentioned in the genealogy. It is therefore not surprising that some scholars hesitate to offer a single explanation and claim that more than one solution is possible (Carter 2000: 61). Indeed, it is not very convincing to suggest that there is only one reason for the inclusion of these women in Jesus’ genealogy. Without an accompanying narrative, a mere list of names of otherwise ambiguous characters will always evoke a variety of associations depending on the prior knowledge and presumptions of the audience. In what follows, rather than offer yet another interpretation of the inclusion of the women in the genealogy, I wish to offer another perspective from which the previously proposed solutions might be viewed.

If Matthew “views Israel’s history both in the light of Jesus and Jesus in the light of the history of Israel” (Smit 2010: 202), then the ending of the genealogy sheds light on the women in the genealogy as much as they shed light on the ending. It is quite striking that, in addition to the irregular nature of their sexual unions and their non-Jewish origins, the first four women are not evenly distributed—they appear only in the segment that begins with Judah and ends with David and Solomon. The irregularities that are associated with the relationships of the first four women are thus channeled through the royal Davidic line. Matthew’s scheme is certainly strengthened by the already existing traditions about these women, most of whom were cleared of any guilt and were even praised in contemporary Jewish literature.⁷ These four women, suspected yet vindicated, directly bring about the appearance of David “the king.” One could say that without them, the kingdom of David and Solomon would not have arisen. Mary appears at an equally strategic place in the genealogy. Her irregular pregnancy brings about the appearance of the Messiah, the “Son of David,” who will finally fulfill God’s promise of the

permanency of the Davidic dynasty. By overcoming different obstacles, each of these women contributed to the realization of history's ultimate goal.

At the same time, however, there is an aspect of the Matthean genealogy that has only occasionally been considered. As the "enlarged footnote" (Stendahl, 1960: 61) of the genealogy (Matt. 1:18-25) indicates, Mary's irregular pregnancy puts her and her unborn child in a dangerous position. Joseph, suspecting adultery, "resolved to divorce her quietly" (Matt 1:19). Beverly Roberts Gaventa notes that "Joseph poses a threat to Mary (and, by implication, to Jesus as well), just as circumstances have threatened several significant women in Israel's history (and, by implication, their offspring and the line of David)" (Gaventa 1999: 31). Even after Joseph abandons this plan and eventually adopts the newborn, another danger befalls "the child and his mother" (Matt. 2:13-14, 20-21). King Herod and then his son Archelaus seek to kill the infant Jesus. Only with the help of divine guidance is the life of the royal child preserved. If the endangered existence of the infant Jesus in Matthew reflects the endangered existence of the Matthean community vis-à-vis the emerging rabbinic Judaism and Roman imperial propaganda, it might offer us another glimpse into the perspective from which the members of the Matthean community reread the past. As much as they were convinced that the promises to David had been finally realized in the appearance of Jesus, the Davidic Messiah, they were not oblivious to the perils of their actual existence. Mary's baby is indeed the royal child, but his life is threatened by the powers that be.⁸ If so, the four women from Israel's distant past prefigure not only the irregularity of Mary's pregnancy but also the threat to her life and the life of her son (Gaventa 1999: 38-39). Past events that anticipate the current community's experience are relocated to functional memory, elucidating present circumstances and shaping the community's sense of identity in relationship to Israel's sacred history. If Matthew's Gospel, as a whole, "legitimizes a *marginal* identity and way of life for the community of disciples," as Warren Carter suggests, then the visibility given to five endangered women legitimizes the alternative identity of the Matthean community, which is shaped by tension with a synagogue community and imperial Rome.⁹ By reaccentuating the basic outline of Israel's past, Matthew incorporates the experience of his own community into the movement of Israel's history toward its ultimate goal.

The last question to be considered here is the question of omissions. If some women were included, why were others, better known and more respected, passed over in silence? Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel have also shown initiative in overcoming the obstacles on their path to motherhood. Yet none of them is named in the genealogy. Carter suggests that the omission of their

names carries no particular significance because the naming of the four women that appear in the genealogy “reminds the audience of other unnamed women like Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and numerous others who played important roles in Israel’s history but are not named specifically in the genealogy” (Carter 2000: 59). Likewise, Irene Nowell argues that four women in the genealogy “remind us to look at *all* the women in the line that leads to Jesus” (Nowell 2008: 2).¹⁰ She adds eight more women to Matthew’s four: Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Athaliah, who belong directly to Jesus’ family tree, and Jezebel, Naamah, Lot’s daughters, and Lot’s wife, who belong indirectly to Jesus’ family tree. Nowell contends that these women share several commonalities with the four that are explicitly mentioned: many of them were considered sinners and foreigners; they struggled with pregnancies and childbirth issues; they were endangered and rejected; and they used unconventional means, even disguise and deceit, to achieve their objectives. She concludes “that the four women in Matthew’s genealogy are there not because they are different but because they are representatives of all Jesus’ great-grandmothers: women who have endured discrimination and false judgment, who have suffered through difficult pregnancies and childbirth, and who know how to use devious means to achieve their purposes” (Nowell 2008: 15).

One wonders, however, whether Matthew’s audience would have been able to catch so many intertextual echoes as Nowell suggests. Her thesis requires an extraordinarily well-versed reader who is able to evoke an entire web of associations about various biblical personalities who are related to each other, however loosely. Yet readers typically pay attention to what the text explicates and disregard what the text leaves out. If the things that are passed over in silence belong to a repository of knowledge that is otherwise available to the reader, such as the biblical records, they will not be entirely forgotten but only relocated to a stored memory. I propose that the absence of other women’s names in the genealogy functions in exactly this way. The stories about the patriarchal wives, most of whom struggled with barrenness and childbearing, belonged to the stored memory of the Matthean community and as such had no direct formative influence on its identity.¹¹ What shaped the identity of Matthew’s readers was the functional memory of several endangered, mostly foreign, women whose irregular relationships brought about the appearance of the Davidic kingdom and, after its temporary downfall, effected its final realization in the Messiah, the Son of David.

CONCLUSION

In what ways, then, does the rereading of the past in post-Communist Croatia shed light on the rereading of the past in Matthew's genealogy? The analysis of the various forms of reshaping collective memory that took place in the transition from Communism to democracy helps us better recognize the various forms of reshaping collective memory in other transitional processes, such as the emergence of early Christianity. The methods employed in Croatia were far-reaching and thorough, with the purpose of making a radical break with the Communist past. The erasure of the names of the Communist heroes from public buildings and streets was one of the most effective means of facilitating public forgetting. That does not mean that the Communist past had been erased from history books, state archives, or public discourse. But a removal of public memorials of this part of Croatia's history significantly reduces its power in shaping Croatian collective identity. Memories that are reactivated are the memories of the events and persons from the heroic past that anticipated Croatia's political independence. Even if some of these individuals had controversial reputations during the Communist regime, their current visibility exonerates them in the public eye and highlights their contribution to Croatian national identity.

Jesus' genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew is far less radical in its configuration and purpose. Matthew's community undeniably saw its own history in continuity with Israel's history. There are, it seems, no conscious efforts to erase certain periods of the past, even the most painful and embarrassing ones. And yet, one cannot overlook a number of devices employed by the author, which either emphasize or deemphasize certain aspects of Israel's history. One of the most noticeable aspects of the genealogy is the central place given to the Davidic dynasty and the individuals, including four controversial women, who led to its realization. In this way, the ambiguities related to their sexual conduct and/or gentile origin are productively utilized in the service of the genealogy's ultimate purpose—to demonstrate that Israel's entire history led to the birth of Jesus, the Davidic Messiah. This, however, does not mean that the author regards everything in Israel's history to be equally important for the realization of this goal. The struggles with barrenness of the patriarchal wives are, although not entirely forgotten, certainly deemphasized. Instead, the anxieties experienced by four extraordinary women, who acted beyond the prescribed framework of normalcy, are evoked through the mention of their names in an otherwise exclusively male family tree. Their stories prefigure not only the unusual pregnancy of the fifth woman in the genealogy but also the experience of the Matthean community. By bringing

to mind certain individuals and overlooking others, the author restructures the collective memory of his community and creates what Aleida Assmann calls “the precondition of the possibility of change and renewal” (Assmann 1999: 136). Through the process of transferring selected events from Israel’s past to functional memory and relocating others to stored memory, the Matthean community developed its distinctive identity over against the emerging rabbinic Judaism.

Notes

1. See also Smith 1986: 202.
2. “Constitution of the Republic of Croatia,” in Trifunovska 1994: 251–52.
3. For a discussion of Stepinac’s attitude during WWII, see Rychlak 2009: 367–83.
4. This is, at least, what the author claims in Matt. 1:17. In reality, however, the third division of the genealogy consists of only thirteen generations. For various explanations of this anomaly, see Novakovic 2003: 46–50.
5. *Jub.* 41:1 and *T. Jud.* 10:1 identify Tamar as a “daughter of Aram.”
6. The unusual spelling of Rahab’s name in the genealogy (Ραχάβ), unattested in other Greek sources, has generated some controversy regarding the identity of the person designated by it. Jerome D. Quinn (1981: 225–28) argues that this is an unknown woman and not the prostitute Rahab mentioned in Scripture. For a rebuttal, see Brown 1982: 79–80. Another problem related to Rahab is that her marriage to Salmon and parentage of Boaz is mentioned nowhere in the Old Testament or early Jewish literature. Richard Bauckham (1995: 323) proposes that Rahab’s marriage to Salmon reflects the midrashic desire to find husbands for those female figures whose husbands are not specified in the Bible.
7. In Ruth 4:12, Tamar is mentioned with respect as the mother of the house of Perez. According to *T. Jud.* 12:1–3, she dressed herself as a bride and not as a prostitute and acted according to custom. A lengthy midrash in *Tg. Neof.* Gen 38:25 emphasizes God’s involvement in Tamar’s justification. Philo, *Congr.* 124–26, describes Tamar as a prototype of virtue and chastity. Pseudo-Philo, *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* 9:5, points out that Tamar’s motive was not fornication but avoidance of defilement through sexual relationship with gentiles. Rahab’s faith and hospitality are emphasized in Heb. 11:31 and Jas. 2:25. According to Josephus, *Ant.* 5.1.2, Rahab was not a prostitute but an innkeeper. Josephus, *Ant.* 5.9.3, emphasizes Ruth’s obedience to her mother-in-law and explains that nothing scandalous happened during the nocturnal encounter between her and Boaz.
8. This aspect of Matthew’s infancy narrative is even more noticeable when compared with Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth. Even though the Lukan Jesus is born in modest circumstances and is visited by one of the lowliest social groups (the shepherds), his safety is not endangered. Joseph does not ponder divorce, and nobody seeks the life of the newborn. The Lukan baby Jesus might be poor, but his life is not jeopardized.
9. According to Carter (2000: 43–45), Matthew’s community “lives as participants in the wider society, but in tension with, over against, as an alternative to its dominant values and structures.”
10. See also Wainwright 1997: 463.
11. Matthew’s lack of interest in the patriarchal wives is even more apparent if Ruth 4:11–12, 17–18 served as a source for his genealogy, because this text does include Rachel and Leah. Under this assumption, the omission of the names of Rachel and Leah, two well-known matriarchs, would have been intentional.