

A REEXAMINATION OF THE HISTORICITY OF JESUS' ENCOUNTER WITH THE GERASENE DEMONIAK IN MARK 5.1-20

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1. *Introduction*

In recent historical Jesus studies, a growing consensus is that Jesus took the role of an exorcist in his earthly ministry.¹ When it comes to a particular exorcism story, however, scholars debate on the degree of historicity within it.² As Craig L. Blomberg remarks, 'Evidence for the general reliability of the Gospel portrait of Jesus as a miracle-worker does not, however, prove the authenticity of every individual miracle.'³ The account of Jesus' en-

* I give thanks to Craig S. Keener for his helpful comments, most of which I have tried to incorporate. I am also indebted to Keldie Paroschi and have been influenced by her article 'Following the Crumbs: Revisiting the Authenticity of Jesus's Encounter with the Syrophoenician Woman' (*JETS* 64 [2021], pp. 509-25).

1. For example, Paul W. Hollenbach illustrates from a social-scientific perspective, 'Demoniacs and exorcists had their place in the social system as much as Sadducees, Pharisees, and the like' ('Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities: A Socio-Historical Study', *JAAR* 49 [1981], pp. 567-88 [582]). Hollenbach further argues that Jesus disrupted the social structure when healing so many demoniacs and even leading a widespread exorcising ministry (p. 584). For an overview of scholarship on Jesus' role as an exorcist, see Amanda Witmer, *Jesus, the Galilean Exorcist: His Exorcisms in Social and Political Context* (LNTS, 459; London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 5-10.

2. For example, Paroschi finds three levels of historicity for the narrative of Mk 7.24-30 among previous scholars ('Following the Crumbs', p. 510).

3. Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Leicester: Apollos, 2nd edn, 2007), p. 129.

counter with the Gerasene demoniac in Mk 5.1-20 is 'the most dramatic and astounding exorcism story in the Gospels',⁴ and 'the one with the most textual and history of tradition problems'.⁵ Regarding the historicity of this account, scholars fall into three categories, namely, those considering it to be (1) entirely historical,⁶ (2) partly historical with later additions,⁷ or (3)

4. Jostein Adna, 'The Encounter of Jesus with the Gerasene Demoniac', in Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (eds.), *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (NTTS, 28; Boston: Brill, 2002), pp. 281-301 (281).

5. Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), p. 72.

6. Some scholars either assume or argue for the historicity of the whole story. See Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2nd edn, 2007), p. 266; Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 179-80; J. Keir Howard, *Disease and Healing in the New Testament: An Analysis and Interpretation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), pp. 85-91; Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, pp. 72-87; Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), pp. 99-102; Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 255; William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 180. For a list of earlier references, see John F. Craghan, 'The Gerasene Demoniac', *CBQ* 30 (1968), pp. 522-36 (522 n. 4).

7. See Andrew Burrow, 'Bargaining with Jesus: Irony in Mark 5:1-20', *BibInt* 25 (2017), pp. 234-51; Adna, 'Encounter of Jesus'; Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 27; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 347; John P. Meier, *Rethinking the Historical Jesus: A Marginal Jew. Volume 2: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (AYBRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 650-53; Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (WBC, 34; Dallas: Word, 1989), pp. 273-74; D.E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (SCM Pelican Commentaries; London: SCM, 1977), p. 150; Rudolf Pesch, 'Markan Version of the Healing of the Gerasene Demoniac', *Ecumenical Review* 23 (1971), pp. 349-76; J. Duncan M. Derrett, 'Contributions to the Study of the Gerasene Demoniac', *JSNT* 2 (1979), pp. 2-17; Craghan, 'Gerasene Demoniac'. Interestingly, Rudolf Bultmann, unlike other form critics positing the evolutionary development of the story, argues, 'This story is essentially intact in its original form' (*The History of the Synoptic Tradition* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1963], p. 210).

originally a tale.⁸ The middle position has been widely taken. As Amanda Witmer notes, ‘Most contemporary Jesus scholars agree that at least the first part of the story could reflect a historical event—an exorcism—that occurred somewhere in the Decapolis region.’⁹ Many reject the historicity of the swine episode in the second part of the narrative (vv. 10-17), accepting that it comes from a later addition. John P. Meier, for example, claims that ‘the original story of the Gerasene demoniac did not include the incident of the pigs rushing into the Sea of Galilee.’¹⁰ Witmer stresses that it is ‘nearly impossible to resolve the question of whether the exorcism was originally linked with the lake and the herd of pigs’.¹¹ Conversely, Graham H. Twelftree contends that ‘much of this story most probably reflects tradition that rightly belongs to the original Jesus story.’¹² Twelftree finds it problematic to discern the original tradition of the narrative with form-critical assumptions.¹³

Although previous scholars have addressed the difficulties in evaluating its historicity, a paucity of consideration has been given to reexamining it according to recent discussions on criteria of historicity, the genre of Gospels,¹⁴ eyewitness testimony,¹⁵ and memory studies.¹⁶ The present

8. For example, Martin Dibelius identifies the story as one of the nine tales in the Gospels (*From Tradition to Gospel* [trans. Bertram L. Wolfe; Library of Theological Translations; repr., Greenwood, CA: Attic Press, 1971], pp. 54-55, 70-74, 89). Also, Walter E. Bundy states, ‘The whole [story] was originally a pagan tale that has found its way into the story of Jesus’ (*Jesus and the First Three Gospels: An Introduction to the Synoptic Tradition* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955], p. 243).

9. Witmer, *Jesus*, p. 167. Cf. Burrow, ‘Bargaining with Jesus’, p. 235 n. 6.

10. Meier, *Rethinking the Historical Jesus: A Marginal Jew. Volume 2*, p. 652. See also Franz Annen, *Heil für die Heiden: Zur Bedeutung und Geschichte der Tradition vom Besessenen Gerasener (Mk 5,1–20 parr.)* (Frankfurter Theologische Studien, 20; Frankfurt am Main: Knecht, 1976), pp. 185-86; Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, p. 283.

11. Witmer, *Jesus*, p. 169.

12. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, p. 87.

13. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, p. 77.

14. See e.g. Charles H. Talbert, *What Is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977); Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 25th anniversary edn, 2020); Michael R. Licona, *Why Are There*

study seeks to address this lacuna, first using the criteria of historical plausibility by Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz to investigate the account's coherence with the broader historical context,¹⁷ then analyzing the consistency of its literary features with eyewitness testimony, and finally interacting with major objections.

2. Historical Context: Criteria of Historical Plausibility

Scholars have largely agreed that the groundwork for understanding the historical Jesus is to 'grasp more fully the social, political, religious, and topographic context of first-century Galilee'.¹⁸ Representative methods are criteria of historical plausibility by Theissen and Merz, or criteria of double dissimilarity and similarity by N.T. Wright, both of which seek to identify the commonality and individuality of Jesus in his historical context.¹⁹ In other words, the more an account fits the specific Palestinian and Galilean context, the more likely it is to be authentic.²⁰ Adopting the same criteria, this section will explore the geographical, economic, social, political, cultural and religious context for assessing the historicity of Jesus' encounter with

Differences in the Gospels? What We Can Learn from Ancient Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

15. See e.g. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 2017).

16. See e.g. Robert K. McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and the Synoptic Gospels* (SBL SBS, 59; Atlanta: SBL, 2011); Craig S. Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

17. Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998). See also Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *Die Kriterienfrage in der Jesusforschung: Vom Differenzkriterium zum Plausibilitätskriterium* (NTOA, 34; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997).

18. Witmer, *Jesus*, p. 6.

19. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, pp. 116-18; N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, 2; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 131-33. Cf. Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, pp. 311-12.

20. Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals* (JSNTSup, 191; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), p. 119.

the Gerasene demoniac in Mk. 5.1-20.²¹ Historical documents and recent archeological studies related to Galilee and the Decapolis will be consulted.

2.1 *Geographical Setting*

All the parallel accounts in the Gospels agree that the encounter took place somewhere in the Decapolis, though the specific location varies. The Decapolis (Δεκάπολις ‘ten cities’ [Mk 5.20]) served as a generic name for a group of Greek cities in southern Syria and northeastern Palestine.²² No evidence is found to indicate that these cities have any political, military or commercial confederations.²³ The specific location has various possibilities due to the thorny textual problems. Mark (5.1) identifies the region as Gerasa (Γερασηνῶν) as followed by Luke (8.26) whereas Matthew (8.28) changes it into Gadara (Γαδαρηνῶν).²⁴ From a textual analysis, Bruce M. Metzger states that Mark’s Γερασηνῶν is most likely to be the original reading.²⁵ This, however, creates a difficulty for the swine miracle because there is no lake behind the cliffs in Gerasa. Moreover, the Sea of Galilee is about 30 miles away from Gerasa. Such a long distance makes impossible the immediate stampeding of the pigs over a cliff into the sea.²⁶ For this

21. The layout of this section is adapted from Paroschi, ‘Following the Crumbs’.

22. S. Thomas Parker, ‘Decapolis Reviewed’, *JBL* 94 (1975), pp. 437-41 (440).

23. Parker, ‘Decapolis Reviewed’, p. 440. Arthur Segal, ‘Decapolis’, in John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (eds.), *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 528-30 (528).

24. Also, Mark has the variants of Γαδαρηνων, Γεργυστηνων, and Γεργεσηνων, Matthew Γερασηνων, Γεργεσηνων, and Γαζαρηνων, and Luke Γεργεσηνων and Γαδαρηνων (NA28).

25. Metzger offers three reasons to support the originality of Mark’s Γερασηνῶν: (1) superior external evidence from both Alexandrian and Western types of text; (2) Γαδαρηνῶν probably as a scribal assimilation to the text in Matthew (8.28); and (3) Γεργεσηνῶν probably as a correction proposed by Origen (*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [London: United Bible Societies, 2nd edn, 1994], p. 72).

26. When speaking of τὴν θάλασσαν in Mk 5.13, the evangelist refers to the Sea/Lake of Galilee. This paper will consistently use ‘the sea’. Cf. Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, p. 108.

reason, Meier suggests removing the swine episode from the original exorcism.²⁷

Nevertheless, the swine incident is not implausible if more considerations are brought into the conversation. The issue of the geographical setting has long been debated since the early church.²⁸ Matthew may have corrected Mark and replaced it with Gadara, which is only five to six miles from the sea.²⁹ Origen contends that the real site is neither Gerasa nor Gadara but Gergesa on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. He elaborates, ‘On the edge of [Gergesa] there is a steep place abutting on the lake, from which it is pointed out that the swine were cast down by the demons.’³⁰ Following Origen, many scholars claim that Gergesa, later named Kursi, is probably the correct location, inasmuch as Mark is unfamiliar with the area of the Decapolis.³¹ William L. Lane points out that, at the south of Kursi, about one mile away, a steep slope is found within forty yards from the shore, as well as cavern tombs nearby.³² Theissen offers another explanation that, because Gerasa had a sudden expansion in the second half of the first century, Mark may have mentioned the most prominent city in that area.³³ This is possible, but from the immediate context of Jesus sailing across the sea, the narrative seems to suggest a setting right across Capernaum (5.1).³⁴ More convincingly, Roger Aus elucidates that Mark’s Gerasa may have come from an Aramaic transliteration of Kursi. In Galilean Aramaic, there

27. Meier, *Rethinking the Historical Jesus: A Marginal Jew. Volume 2*, p. 661.

28. For a detailed discussion on debates in earlier centuries, see Joshua T. King, ‘Gadarenes, Gerasenes, and Gergesenes: Ancient and Medieval Debates Surrounding the Location of the Swine Miracle’, *ASE* 36 (2019), pp. 343-57.

29. Witmer, *Jesus*, p. 168.

30. Origen, *Epistle to Gregory and Origen’s Commentary on the Gospel of John* 6.24 (ANF 9/372).

31. See e.g. Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, pp. 179-80; Howard, *Disease and Healing*, p. 86; Gundry, *Mark*, p. 256.

32. Lane, *Gospel According to Mark*, p. 181.

33. Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, p. 109. However, Theissen is incorrect in stating that Gerasa served as the capital of the Decapolis for several years. The Decapolis never functioned as a ‘league’, and the cities did not have a formal political or military affiliation (Parker, ‘Decapolis Reviewed’, p. 440; Segal, ‘Decapolis’).

34. Howard, *Disease and Healing*, p. 86.

was a common tendency to change כ to ג, and thus Kursi (כרסי) may have been pronounced as Garse (גרסאי) in the primitive Semitic form of Γερασηνῶν.³⁵ From these considerations, Gergesa on the eastern shore of the sea seems probable. We can at least conclude that, while Mark's Gerasa is strongly attested by the textual analysis, it cannot be decisive against the authenticity of the swine incident.

2.2 Economic Context

Strong economic ties and trade routes between Galilee and the Decapolis in the early Roman period support the plausibility of Jesus' journey to the Decapolis and his encounter with the Gerasene demoniac. With stable economic conditions and abundant resources, especially fertile soil and pasturage, Galilee regularly exported goods to Syria and other bordering areas prior to the revolt.³⁶ Recent archeological discoveries have shown that the Sea of Galilee 'served as an efficient marine route from west to east and vice versa, allowing the transportation of not only goods used in daily life but also large, imported architectural elements including monolithic marble and granite shafts'.³⁷ Also, the rapid urbanization of Galilee made its cities important commercial hubs connecting the eastern and western sides of the sea (Josephus, *Life* 349).³⁸ The founding of Tiberias, in particular, in-

35. Roger Aus, *My Name is "Legion": Palestinian Judaic Traditions in Mark 5, 1–20 and Other Gospel Texts* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003), pp. 73–82.

36. Bradley W. Root, *First Century Galilee: A Fresh Examination of the Sources* (WUNT, 2/378; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), p. 21.

37. Michael Eisenberg, 'New Discoveries at Antiochia Hippos of the Decapolis and its Sea of Galilee Connection', *Early Christianity* 10 (2019), pp. 363–82 (381–82). Michael Osband and Michael Eisenberg also argue, 'The Sea of Galilee maritime route between the Galilean shore and the Decapolis shore was likely the most common and efficient trade route until modern times' ('Interregional Trade in the Roman Period: A Diachronic Study of Common Kitchenware from Hippos of the Decapolis', *TA* 45 [2018], pp. 273–88 [287]). See also Jürgen Zangenberg, 'Anchoring Ancient Galilee at the Lakeshore: Towards Re-Conceptualizing Ancient Galilee as a Mediterranean Environment', *Early Christianity* 10 (2019), pp. 265–91 (277).

38. Cf. Root, *First Century Galilee*, pp. 17–18, 22–25, 117; Seán Freyne, *Galilee, from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.: A Study of*

creased the interregional interaction.³⁹ Galilee may have also become '[a] contact zone between the Mediterranean Sea and the Syrian hinterland'.⁴⁰ This can be evidenced by many Alexandrian products, such as religious souvenirs and luxury objects, found in southern Syria. The transportation of these goods from Alexandria to Syria must have gone through the Palestinian area in which Galilee is likely to have been one of the commercial links.⁴¹ Additionally, Capernaum as a fishing village in eastern Galilee may have served as 'a bridge of Jewish settlements ranging from Upper and Lower Galilee across the Jordan into the Golan'.⁴² Although not a major interregional trade route, Capernaum is found to have experienced some interregional traffic in the early first century.⁴³ From these discoveries, one can imagine that economic interactions between the two sides of the sea were probably active during Jesus' ministry. Hence, it is plausible that Jesus took a convenient path from Capernaum, the base of his ministry, to the Decapolis.

2.3 *Social and political Context*

Social tensions between Galilee and the Decapolis co-existed with the active economic interactions, which coheres with Jesus' encounter with the Gerasene demoniac, especially the rejection from local inhabitants after the exorcism. Ethnically, there was a prominent distinction between Galilee and the Decapolis. In Galilee, the population was primarily Jewish.⁴⁴ In the

Second Temple Judaism (Studies in Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), p. 134.

39. Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Reexamination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), p. 146.

40. Zangenberg, 'Anchoring Ancient Galilee', pp. 273-74.

41. Thomas M. Weber, 'Gadara and the Galilee', in Jürgen Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge and Dale B. Martin (eds.), *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee: A Region in Transition* (WUNT, 210; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), pp. 449-77 (452). See also Zangenberg, 'Anchoring Ancient Galilee', p. 286 n. 76.

42. Reed, *Archaeology*, p. 145.

43. Reed, *Archaeology*, p. 148; Zangenberg, 'Anchoring Ancient Galilee', p. 283.

44. Root, *First Century Galilee*, p. 146.

Decapolis, it was mostly gentile mixed with a small group of Jews.⁴⁵ This ethnic distinction entailed hostile feelings between the two sides of the sea for generations. In 44 CE, for example, Jews in Perea and the Philadelphians fought against each other over a village (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.2).⁴⁶ Moreover, Justus of Tiberias led Jews to attack Gadara and Hippos, setting some of their villages on fire (Josephus, *Life* 41-42; 62-67). Josephus also mentions that the inhabitants of Gadara, Gabara and Sogana, along with the Tyrians, attacked Gischala, a small city in Galilee (*Life*, 43-45). The Jewish-gentile tension may have existed earlier in the first century and was intensified toward the time of the revolt.⁴⁷

The tension between Jews and gentiles were probably related to the political dynamics especially on the eastern side of the sea. Since the first century BCE, the Decapolis had experienced several Jewish controls, from the Hasmonean rule through the Pompeian era to the Herodian reigns. Jews believed that the land east of the Jordan belonged to the Davidic kingdom, which caused them to claim it in the Hasmonean period (cf. 2 Sam. 8.5-15; Josephus, *Ant.* 7.104).⁴⁸ In 63 BCE, Pompey captured Jerusalem and incorporated the Decapolis into the Roman Empire. His liberation of these cities from the Jewish control was appreciated by many gentile inhabitants (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 14.74-76).⁴⁹ As E.P. Sanders illustrates, 'The Gentile cities did not want to be governed by Jews, and many celebrated their liberation by Pompey by instituting a new calendar that began with Pompey's conquest.'⁵⁰ In 30 BCE and following, part of the Decapolis was included into the client kingdom of Herod the Great.⁵¹ After Herod's death, his son Philip inherited most of his non-Jewish territory. Augustus placed some

45. Segal, 'Decapolis', pp. 529-30.

46. Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, p. 109.

47. Reed, *Archaeology*, p. 146; Root, *First Century Galilee*, p. 41; Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, p. 109.

48. Segal, 'Decapolis', p. 529.

49. Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, p. 109.

50. E.P. Sanders, 'Jesus' Galilee', in Ismo Dunderberg, Christopher Tuckett and Kari Syreeni (eds.), *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflicts in Early Christianity—Essays in Honour of Heikki Räisänen* (NovTSup, 103; Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 3-41 (17).

51. Cf. Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian, Volume 2: The Roman Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 355.

cities under the province of Syria, such as Hippos and Gadara, recognizing the differences between Jews and gentiles (cf. Josephus, *War* 2.94-100).⁵² From this political background, the Jewish-gentile tension in the bordering areas of Galilee and the Decapolis may have remained in the early first century CE. Considering that the region where Jesus encountered the demoniac was dominated by gentiles, it is historically plausible that under the shadow of the Jewish-gentile tension, the local inhabitants refused to welcome Jesus (cf. 5.17).⁵³

Despite the ethnic tension, the social environment in the bordering regions of Galilee was mostly stable in the early first century. This may have been attributed to the political stability under the reign of Antipas who received from Herod the Great the Jewish territory of Peraea and Galilee (4–39 CE).⁵⁴ Antipas was portrayed by Josephus as Herod's most complacent son, loving 'the state of quietness' (*ἀγαπῶν τὴν ἡσυχίαν*) (*Ant.* 18.245).⁵⁵ While at the beginning of his rule several revolts occurred in Galilee (cf. Josephus, *Life*, 286-289), Bradley W. Root argues, 'Antipas's 43-year reign was free of any major political or economic disturbances.'⁵⁶ Sanders also stresses that no Roman military forces were involved in his tetrarchy.⁵⁷ Therefore, Antipas's achievement of tranquility may have enabled Jews to travel freely across the bordering regions of Galilee, which again makes plausible Jesus' journey to the Decapolis.⁵⁸

52. Sanders, 'Jesus' Galilee', p. 18; Reed, *Archaeology*, p. 146.

53. Since there were graveyards in that region (Mk 5.2; Mt. 8.28; Lk. 8.27), the local inhabitants were probably gentiles. Customarily, Jews live far away from such a place, believing that graveyards could transmit ritual impurity to nearby residents (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.36-38). Cf. Meier, *Rethinking the Historical Jesus: A Marginal Jew. Volume 2*, p. 667 n. 25.

54. David C. Braund, 'Herod Antipas', *ABD* 3, p. 160.

55. The word *ἡσυχία* basically means 'the state of quietness without disturbance' (BDAG, p. 440).

56. Root, *First Century Galilee*, p. 26.

57. Sanders, 'Jesus' Galilee', p. 10; Freyne, *Galilee*, p. 69.

58. Jesus is said to have travelled to Bethsaida in Philip's realm and made many followers there (e.g. Mk 6.45; 8.22; Lk. 9.10; Jn 1.44; 12.21). Cf. Reed, *Archaeology*, p. 146 n. 23.

2.4 Cultural and Religious Context

The ethnic distinction also entailed cultural and religious differences between the two sides of the sea. In the Decapolis, most citizens shared a common religious and cultural identity with the Greco-Roman society, albeit adopting some Semitic expressions from the neighboring regions.⁵⁹ Since the time of Herod the Great, many projects, such as pagan temples, had been erected to honor the Roman emperors.⁶⁰ Also, Philip rebuilt the city of Panias, renaming it Caesarea Philippi in honor of himself and Augustus, and he expanded Bethsaida, renaming it Julias in honor of Augustus's daughter Julia.⁶¹ Indeed, the Decapolis was essentially Hellenistic.⁶² In comparison, Galilee was less Hellenized. Despite the urbanization and the rise of Hellenistic ethos, most Galileans followed Jewish traditions and practices, such as paying tithes to the priests, observing the Sabbath, and making pilgrimage to Jerusalem.⁶³ No evidence is found for pagan worship in Galilee because pagan temples and activities in them were hateful to the Jews.⁶⁴ For Galilean loyalties, Jerusalem was the real religious and cultural center.⁶⁵ As a result, the cultural and religious differences may have contributed to the Jewish-gentile tension between Galilee and the Decapolis. As Jürgen Zangenberg affirms, 'The centrality of eastern Galilee, its connectedness and openness to economic and social influences, in fact, created a situ-

59. Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais, 'Decapolis', *ABD* 2, p. 119; Parker, 'Decapolis Reviewed', p. 440; Eric M. Meyers, 'Jesus and his Galilean Context', in Douglas R. Edwards and C. Thomas McCollough (eds.), *Archaeology and the Galilee: Texts and Contexts in the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Periods* (SFSHJ, 143; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), pp. 57-66 (62).

60. Root, *First Century Galilee*, p. 36. For a detailed analysis, see Sanders, 'Jesus' Galilee', pp. 18-22.

61. Adam Marshak, 'Herod the Great', in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, pp. 729-35 (737); Root, *First Century Galilee*, p. 127.

62. Cf. Parker, 'Decapolis Reviewed', p. 440.

63. The predominance of the Jewish religious ethos in Galilee can be supported by four factors: (1) the absence of pagan temples and artifacts; (2) the presence of synagogues; (3) the avoidance of figurative art; and (4) the intense focus on ritual purity. See Root, *First Century Galilee*, pp. 35, 127.

64. Cf. Root, *First Century Galilee*, p. 127; Sanders, 'Jesus' Galilee', p. 22.

65. Freyne, *Galilee*, p. 139.

ation in which assimilation and rejection existed simultaneously.⁶⁶ If assimilation and rejection existed also in the Decapolis, the rejection of Jesus by the local inhabitants becomes historically plausible.

Moreover, the religious differences confirm that the eastern side of the sea is the plausible location for the swine incident in the second part of Jesus' exorcism, just as Mark's narrative itself indicates. Archeologically, pig bones are found at many sites of the Decapolis but almost absent at the sites of Galilee.⁶⁷ Religiously, pigs in the Hellenistic world are used not only for meals but also as sacrifices to gods, such as Zeus and Artemis.⁶⁸ In the Jewish tradition, however, pigs are considered unclean animals, and eating pork is forbidden by the Law (cf. Lev. 11.78; Deut. 14.8; cf. 2 Macc. 6.18-20). For these reasons, the presence of pigs in the setting where Jesus encountered the Gerasene demoniac fits the cultural and religious context of the Decapolis. This supports the historical probability of the swine incident.

From the entire analysis above, we can synthesize the historical context by noting that Galilee and the Decapolis in the early Roman period enjoyed stable economic interactions and simultaneously experienced social and religious tensions.⁶⁹ This context coheres with the incident of Jesus' encounter with the Gerasene demoniac, including the swine episode and the rejection from the local inhabitants. Therefore, the exploration of the geographical, economic, social, political, cultural and religious context largely supports the historicity of the entire account of Jesus' encounter with the Gerasene demoniac.

66. Zangenberg, 'Anchoring Ancient Galilee', p. 289.

67. Root, *First Century Galilee*, p. 101; Reed, *Archaeology*, pp. 49, 117-19; Lamia Salim El-Khoury, 'The Roman Countryside in North-West Jordan (63 BC–AD 324)', *Levant* 40 (2008), pp. 71-87 (83).

68. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; trans. James E. Crouch; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 24. Cf. David Kennedy, *Gerasa and the Decapolis* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 181; Gunnell Ekroth, *The Sacrificial Rituals of Greek Hero-Cults in the Archaic to the Early Hellenistic Period* (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2002), pp. 129-213.

69. Cf. Weber, 'Gadara and Galilee', p. 476; Zangenberg, 'Anchoring Ancient Galilee', pp. 288-89.

3. *Genre of the Gospels, Eyewitness Testimony and Memory Studies*

3.1 *Genre of the Gospels*

Equally important in assessing the historicity of Jesus' encounter with the Gerasene demoniac is to situate the sources, namely, the Gospel accounts, within their own literary milieu. Whether or not an account derives from a historical event largely depends on its genre, i.e. the form of transmission and composition.⁷⁰ As such, this section will first discuss the genre of the Gospels in general and then evaluate the historical reliability of Mark's account in particular.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, many scholars have recognized that the Gospels are not *sui generis*, i.e. of a unique genre, but in the form of Greco-Roman biography.⁷¹ This shift has reshaped the way in which scholars examine the historicity of the Jesus stories in the Gospels. From his broad survey, for example, Craig S. Keener discovers that Greco-Roman biographies in the early Roman period are basically built upon historical events.⁷² He concludes, 'Expectations for reliable historical content seem to have been the highest in roughly the period from the first century BCE to the early third century CE, perhaps peaking in the early second century.'⁷³ Like ancient historians, ancient biographers are tethered by the

70. For the significance of genre in discerning historicity of the Gospels, see Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, pp. 296-321; Keener, *Christobiography*, pp. 38-52.

71. For an overview of scholarship, see BurrIDGE, *What Are the Gospels?* pp. 1-112; Keener, *Christobiography*, pp. 27-33. Different from BurrIDGE, Keener categorizes Luke-Acts as historiography or 'biohistory' (*Christobiography*, pp. 221-39). This difference does not undermine but increase the historical reliability of the Gospels. While acknowledging the blurry borderline between ancient biography and historiography, this paper generally considers that the Gospels are written in the genre of Greco-Roman biography.

72. Keener, *Christobiography*, pp. 155-60. By definition, Keener elucidates, 'In the period in which the Gospels were written, mainstream biography was understood as a narrative about a real individual based on available information, and in cases of recent figures, the information available could be substantial' (*Christobiography*, p. 33).

73. Keener, *Christobiography*, pp. 68-103 (103).

sources they receive, having very little tendency to invent new stories.⁷⁴ Ancient biographers ‘could reshape [the events] rhetorically, but the genre in which they chose to write meant a focus on shaping the remembered past, not on unrestrained literary creativity’.⁷⁵ Luke, for instance, explicitly addresses in his prologue how he carefully investigates written and oral sources (Lk. 1.1-4).⁷⁶ Since Mark employs the same compositional form, his Gospel would have also been restricted by his sources. If this is the case particularly for the account of Jesus’ encounter with the demoniac, the degree of its historicity then depends on the reliability of its source(s).

3.2 *Eyewitness Testimony and Memory*

The genre of the Gospels as Greco-Roman biography allows scholars to further investigate what sources the evangelists may have consulted. In his monograph *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Richard Bauckham explicates that the Gospel stories are substantially recorded from eyewitness testimony, a significant type of sources for ancient historical writings.⁷⁷ Opposed to form-critical assumptions, Bauckham claims, ‘The continuity of the Gospels is with the testimony of the eyewitnesses, not via a long period of community transmission but through, in many cases, immediate access to the eyewit-

74. The genre of Greco-Roman biography is aimed at giving priority to the positive or negative characters of the subjects rather than historical accuracy (Keener, *Christobiography*, p. 149). For example, the Roman biographer Cornelius Nepos (99–24 BCE) chose his subjects from those famous for artistic or political achievements during his time and presented them as *exempla* for the public. To shape his biographies, Nepos preferred concise narratives, focusing on the telling aspects. Thus, he managed to balance between selective and inclusive arrangement of the background information (cf. Rex Stem, *The Political Biographies of Cornelius Nepos* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012], pp. 128–61). The bloom of ancient Greco-Roman biography began with Nepos, as Keener notes: ‘Nepos exemplifies both historical and encomiastic interests, as in the Gospels’ (*Christobiography*, p. 79).

75. Keener, *Christobiography*, p. 182. Licona also demonstrates that the Gospel writers employ many compositional techniques that can be found in progymnasmata, i.e. preliminary rhetorical exercises commonly taught in antiquity (*Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?* p. 199).

76. Cf. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2015), I, p. 173.

77. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 491.

nesses.⁷⁸ Eyewitness testimony was assumed to be reliable by ancient audience until shown otherwise.⁷⁹ If Mark had the access to eyewitness testimony when composing the account in 5.1-20, its historicity would increase. Mark would have had limited freedom to change the historical data, though having some flexibility in his literary arrangement.⁸⁰

First, the presence of eyewitnesses in Jesus' encounter with the Gerasene demoniac makes plausible that Mark received eyewitness testimony. As known from the narrative, three groups of eyewitnesses are present, including the healed demoniac, the disciples and the herdsmen along with local inhabitants. The healed demoniac is mentioned to have reported Jesus' deeds throughout the area of the Decapolis (5.19-20). He would have contributed to Mark's account directly or indirectly.⁸¹ Mark would have also consulted some of the disciples who held high credibility among early Christian communities.⁸² The early Christians may not have treated the herdsmen and local inhabitants as trustworthy witnesses, but their presence would have forced Jesus' close followers to avoid distorting their observations.⁸³ Therefore, the disciples and the healed demoniac are more likely to have functioned as major eyewitnesses for the encounter.

Furthermore, the eyewitnesses' memories would have been the most reliable sources for Jesus' encounter with the demoniac by the time of Mark's writing.⁸⁴ In recent memory studies, psychologists have shown that a correct memory of an event from decades ago is probable especially when the

78. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 309.

79. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 486.

80. Licona finds that, compared to other ancient biographies, such as Plutarch's *Lives*, the Gospels have minimal editorial differences (*Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?* p. 199). This may suggest that the Gospel writers had the tendency to adhere to the sources they received.

81. Cf. Gundry, *Mark*, p. 255.

82. Cf. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pp. 114-46.

83. Cf. Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, p. 99.

84. As James D.G. Dunn claims, the eyewitnesses presented the Jesus they remembered, the closest one to the historical Jesus (*Christianity in the Making—Volume 1: Jesus Remembered* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], p. 335). Similarly, the eyewitness memory can provide the most reliable version of Jesus' encounter with the demoniac.

event is unusual, consequential or emotionally provocative.⁸⁵ Capable of gist memory, humanity can preserve the core of an event for a long time, albeit vague about spatial and temporal references.⁸⁶ As Robert K. McIver elaborates, 'Memory frailties of transience, suggestibility and hindsight bias ... have more impact on the details of memories rather than on the general gist of what is remembered.'⁸⁷ This may explain why the geographical location of the encounter has many variants while the gist of the story remains almost the same among the Gospels, including Jesus' encounter with the demoniac(s) (Mk 5.6-10; cf. Mt. 8.29; Lk. 8.28-31),⁸⁸ the swine incident (Mk 5.11-13; cf. Mt. 8.30-32; Lk. 8.32-33) and the rejection of Jesus by the local inhabitants (Mk 5.14-17; cf. Mt. 8.33-34; Lk. 8.34-37). Considering that Jesus' exorcising activity would have been momentous to the healed demoniac as well as the disciples, they could have preserved reliable memories about the incident by the time when Mark composed the account.

McIver's memory studies can further support that the details of the encounter may also have some historical accuracy. When one is emotionally involved in an unusual event, one can keep the memory with correct details for more than fifty years.⁸⁹ If Jesus' eyewitnesses remained active in Mark's time, they could have preserved their memories for thirty-five to forty-five years, the period between Jesus' activity and Mark's writing.⁹⁰ This time span is not uncommon in ancient historical writings. For example,

85. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pp. 319-33; McIver, *Memory*, p. 146.

86. McIver, *Memory*, p. 160; Keener, *Christobiography*, pp. 386-90.

87. McIver, *Memory*, p. 160.

88. Matthew differs from Mark and Luke in the number of healed demoniacs. Knowing Mark's account, Matthew changed it from one demoniac to two. This discrepancy may come from Matthew's use of a different tradition. If the latter, the encounter may be multiply attested, which strengthens the historicity of the encounter. As Howard points out, multiple variants 'give some weight to the possibility of alternative traditions being in circulation and used by the evangelists' (*Disease and Healing*, p. 85).

89. McIver, *Memory*, p. 146.

90. John S. Kloppenborg points out, 'The date of the Gospel of Mark is generally set a few years either side of the destruction of the Second Temple on the 9th of Av, 70 CE' ('Evocatio Deorum and the Date of Mark', *JBL* 124 [2005], pp. 419-50 [419]). If Jesus' journey to the Decapolis took place around 33 CE, his eyewitnesses would have kept their memories for 35-45 years.

Josephus claimed himself to be an eyewitness of an exorcism by a Jewish exorcist named Eleazar (*Ant.* 8.46-48). Also, Tacitus received from his eyewitnesses two miraculous healings conducted by Vespasian (*Hist.* 4.81.3). Between the writing of these historians and the respective events is a period of twenty-five to thirty-five years, which is comparable to the period between Mark's writing and Jesus' ministry, though slightly shorter.⁹¹ Since the healed demoniac was personally and perhaps emotionally involved in Jesus' exorcism, he would have offered the eyewitness testimony with many correct details. If his testimony is a source for Mark, the historical reliability of his account increases.

3.3 *Literary Consistency with Eyewitness Testimony.*

The literary features in 5.1-20 further confirm that the account comes from eyewitness testimony. McIver suggests that if the account is full of irrelevant details and sensory information, it is likely to have come from eyewitness testimony.⁹² To be specific, the description of the pre-cured demoniac accounts for 17.5 percent of the pericope, 57 words out of 325 (cf. 5.3-5). Luke boils it down to 22 words (cf. 8.29), and Matthew leaves out almost all the details (cf. 8.28).⁹³ Matthew also omits Mark's description of the post-cured demoniac (cf. 5.14-16; Mt. 8.34), along with the scene of Jesus send-

91. This analysis is modified from Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, pp. 103-4. Theissen considers the time span between Jesus' activity and Mark's writing to be 25-35 years, but according to recent studies, the time span could be a bit longer.

92. For McIver, the criterion of identifying sensory information with irrelevant details is necessary, though insufficient. He claims, 'Identifying their presence is the first step in identifying the possibility that eyewitness traditions were incorporated into the documents' (*Memory*, pp. 124-25). Similarly, Meier suggests that 'liveness and concrete details—especially when the details are not relevant to the main point of the story—are sometimes taken to be indicators of an eyewitness report.' Yet Meier considers it to be a secondary argument for historicity (*Rethinking the Historical Jesus: A Marginal Jew. Volume 1: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* [AYBRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991], pp. 180-82).

93. This article assumes Markan priority, but a different assumption of the synoptic relationship would not make any major difference in my conclusion. Essentially, the three accounts vary at the detail level but share the same gist of the incident. For an analysis of Markan priority, see Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, pp. 40-45; Robert H. Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2nd edn, 2001), pp. 29-152.

ing him home (cf. 5.18-20). Clearly, Matthew's massive abridgment of Mark's account is at the level of detail. Matthew was probably aware of the historical core and considered the details to be extraneous in his composition. In contrast, Mark would have preserved much of the information from the eyewitness testimony, which leads to redundancies in the lengthy narrative.⁹⁴ Moreover, the rushing of the pigs into the sea, the most prominent scene in the story, would have caused strong emotional reactions, such as fear, among the local inhabitants (5.15; cf. Lk. 8.35, 37).⁹⁵ Matthew again omits such sensory information but includes the swine incident (Mt. 8.32). This confirms that the swine incident is part of the historical core rather than a later addition. Above all, the detailed and redundant description with sensory information in Mark's account enhances the possibility that eyewitness testimony lies behind it.

To summarize, the historical reliability of Mark's account in 5.1-20 can be supported by external and internal evidence. The Gospels were written in the genre of Greco-Roman biography. As a form of ancient historical writing, the genre adds a certain degree of historicity to Jesus' encounter with the Gerasene demoniac. Further, Mark is likely to have consulted the eyewitnesses who were able to offer reliable information about the historical event from their memories. The literary features confirm that Mark would have largely recorded eyewitness memory with redundant details. If these considerations are correct, Mark's account of the encounter can be historically reliable. And the swine incident, as part of the historical core, would not have come from a later addition.

4. *Interacting with Major Objections*

As mentioned earlier, the difficulty for establishing the historicity of Jesus' encounter with the Gerasene demoniac resides in the swine episode, including the transference of the demons to the pigs, the rushing down of the pigs into the sea, and their drowning (5.10-17). Scholars have raised three major objections against the historicity of the swine incident: (1) its incoherence

94. Cf. Howard, *Disease and Healing*, p. 85.

95. In Jesus' other exorcism stories, the bystanders are often amazed (e.g. 1.27; 2.12; 5.42). Here, it seems that the fear is stressed over amazement because of the loss of the pigs.

with conventional exorcisms; (2) rich symbolic expressions; and (3) contradiction with common sense. After close examination, this section will demonstrate that these objections are not indisputable.

4.1 *Incoherence with Conventional Exorcisms*

The first and primary objection to the historicity of the swine episode is built upon its incoherence with conventional exorcisms. Franz Annen, for example, points out that such a destructive miracle as harming the animals is not mentioned elsewhere in the Gospels.⁹⁶ Rudolf Pesch also notes that the swine episode is rather unique in comparison to traditional exorcisms in the ancient world. As he illustrates, traditional exorcisms fall into two categories: (1) *apopompe*, i.e. the simple expelling of a demon without concerns about where it goes next and (2) *epipompe*, i.e. a greater success of exorcism by banishing the demon into a new specified host, such as an animal or a distant place (e.g. Tob. 8.3).⁹⁷ It is under the first category that Jesus regularly practices his exorcising activities, especially by a word of command (cf. 1.25; 9.25-26).⁹⁸ In the account of 5.1-20, however, the exorcism is performed under the second category. The demons are not just cast out of the possessed man but also transferred into the pigs. Much stranger is that this exorcism is made not by Jesus' command, but by the demons' petition, as they beg Jesus, 'Send us into the pigs in order that we may enter them'

96. Annen primarily employs the criterion of coherence to reject the historicity of the swine episode (*Heil für die Heiden*, p. 192. Cf. Meier, *Rethinking the Historical Jesus: A Marginal Jew. Volume 2*, p. 665 n. 18). By definition, the criterion of coherence 'holds that other sayings and deeds of Jesus that fit in well with the preliminary "data base" established by [the primary] criteria have a good chance of being historical' (Meier, *Rethinking the Historical Jesus: A Marginal Jew. Volume 1*, p. 176). For Meier, this criterion is only secondary. Moreover, the incoherence with traditional exorcisms cannot sufficiently confirm the opposite conclusion that the incident is unhistorical.

97. Pesch, 'Markan Version', p. 366. See also Otto Weinreich, *Religions-geschichtliche Studien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), p. 13.

98. For parallel exorcisms outside the Bible, see Pesch, 'Markan Version', pp. 363-64.

(5.12).⁹⁹ Because of this distinctiveness, scholars such as Pesch refuse to accept the swine incident as historical.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, such distinctiveness is not sufficient to disprove the historicity of the incident. By the criterion of dissimilarity, one would find the opposite conclusion. As Norman Perrin proposes, '[The] material may be ascribed to Jesus only if it can be shown to be distinctive of him, which usually will mean dissimilar to known tendencies in Judaism before him or the church after him.'¹⁰¹ Pesch has neglected that the uniqueness of the swine incident is relative rather than absolute. The exorcism does not totally depart from the basic features of traditional exorcisms.¹⁰² James D.G. Dunn suggests, 'Any feature which is characteristic of Jesus within the Jesus tradition and relatively distinctive of the Jesus tradition is most likely to go back to Jesus, that is, to reflect the original impact made by Jesus' teaching and actions on several at least of his first disciples.'¹⁰³ By this criterion, the evidence of similarities with dissimilarities can strengthen the historicity of the exorcism, especially the swine incident.

The rejection of Jesus by the local inhabitants at the end of the story seems also distinctive. Usually, Jesus' exorcism ends up with the crowds' expectation for more healings (e.g. 1.33-34; 3.7-12). Whereas in 5.1-20, the local inhabitants ask Jesus to leave their neighborhood, even though he had healed the demoniac (5.16-17). This is probably because the loss of the pigs

99. Also in 5.7, as the demon says to Jesus, 'I adjure ($\delta\rho\kappa\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$) you by God, torment me not,' Collins remarks that $\delta\rho\kappa\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ is 'usually used by the exorcist to force the demon to depart from the possessed person' (Collins, *Mark*, p. 268). Matthew omits this part of the speech, whereas Luke replaces $\delta\rho\kappa\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ with $\delta\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\mu\alpha\iota$ (Lk. 8.28). Mark's $\delta\rho\kappa\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ may have seemed strange to Matthew and Luke, thus leading to the respective redactions (Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, p. 82).

100. Pesch, 'Markan Version', p. 367.

101. Norman Perrin, *What Is Redaction Criticism?* (GBS; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 71. For an introduction to the criterion of double dissimilarity and its development, see Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, pp. 70-76.

102. Bultmann has listed five common stages of exorcism stories: (1) encountering the demon(iac); (2) describing the dangerous character of sickness caused by the demon; (3) the demon recognizing the exorcist; (4) exorcism; (5) departure of the demon; and (6) impression on the spectator (*History*, 210). See also Pesch, 'Markan Version', pp. 354-59.

103. Dunn, *Christianity*, p. 333.

has angered them. As is discussed in the preceding analysis, the rejection from the inhabitants may reflect the social and religious tensions between Jews and gentiles in the bordering area of the sea. Furthermore, according to the criterion of embarrassment,¹⁰⁴ one may find that the rejection portrays a negative picture of Jesus and could not have been invented by the Christian communities.¹⁰⁵ If the story were created to cohere with other exorcism stories, early Christians would not have found it necessary to create such an embarrassing ending.¹⁰⁶

4.2 Rich Symbolic Expressions

Noticing that Mark's narrative is full of symbolic languages, some scholars hesitate to affirm the historicity of the story.¹⁰⁷ The most obvious instance is the Roman military term 'Legion', mentioned as the name of the demons (5.9b). The tenth legion, *Legio Decima Fretensis*, had been stationed in Syria since 6 CE. Syrian citizens may have been familiar with the military term.¹⁰⁸ Twelftree is possibly correct in arguing that 'in the territory occupied by the Romans, "legion" was an appropriate term to express the great number of demons.'¹⁰⁹ Moreover, Mark estimates that the number of the pigs was 'about two thousand' (ὡς δισχιλίοι [5.13]).¹¹⁰ Even if an ideologi-

104. The criterion of embarrassment serves to show that 'the early Church would hardly have gone out of its way to create material that only embarrassed its creator or weakened its position in arguments as opponents' (Meier, *Rethinking the Historical Jesus: A Marginal Jew. Volume 1*, pp. 168-71).

105. Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, p. 99.

106. Cf. Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, p. 123.

107. For an overview, see Witmer, *Jesus*, pp. 170-73. See also Warren Carter, 'Cross-Gendered Romans and Mark's Jesus: Legion Enters the Pigs (Mark 5:1-20)', *JBL* 134 (2015), pp. 139-55.

108. Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 14.74-76; *War* 2.39-41; 3.233, 289; Paul Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus* (SJ, 1; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2nd edn, 1974), p. 181; Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, p. 110.

109. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, p. 85.

110. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, p. 85. One may notice that such a vast number of pigs is unusual in the first-century context. A normal size of a herd was 100 to 150, and an exceedingly large one could be 300 (Varro, *Rust.* 2.4.22; cf. Gundry, *Mark*, p. 252). Yet it is not impossible that Mark made an exaggeration or inaccurate estimate. Or perhaps, there were multiple herds in that setting. In a word, the oddly large number of pigs cannot sufficiently deny the historicity of the incident.

cal connection between the drowning pigs and Roman soldiers exists in Mark's account, it does not necessarily contradict the historicity of the incident. A full legion consisted of approximately 5,300 soldiers. It was divided into ten cohorts, each of which included about 500 soldiers (cf. Acts 10.1).¹¹¹ Perhaps, the number of the pigs was equivalent to that of several cohorts from the legion.

Alternatively, the term 'Legion' may have referred to a type of demons in the ancient Mediterranean world.¹¹² For instance, archeologists have excavated an incantation bowl with pagan origin in Nippur dated from early centuries. On the bowl, there is an inscription written in a Syriac dialect of Aramaic, claiming that it protects the household of Zaroi from 'all the Legions and the Amulet-spirits and the Ishtars and all the Demons'.¹¹³ This suggests that the demons' self-identification as Legion may have some historical roots. In short, the presence of symbolic imagery cannot serve as the basis for invalidating the historicity of the incident.

4.3 *Contradiction with Common Sense*

Another objection to the historicity of the swine incident comes from the contradiction with common sense. As some scholars point out, pigs can swim, and unlike horses or cattle, pigs do not stampede when panicked.¹¹⁴ Opposed to this objection, Robert H. Gundry argues, 'Other animals and human beings can also swim, they nevertheless can drown,' and 'The influence of the spirits on the pigs is highlighted by the fact that on their own, pigs do not stay together.'¹¹⁵ The problem of this objection comes from the presupposition of a rationalizing approach that miracles cannot violate natu-

111. J. Carl Laney, 'Peter and the Centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:1–48)', in Barry J. Beitzel, Jessica Parks and Douglas Mangum (eds.), *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), pp. 246–68 (248).

112. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, p. 85; Witmer, *Jesus*, p. 170.

113. James A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Museum, 1913), pp. 242–43.

114. Pesch, 'Markan Version', p. 349; Derrett, 'Contributions', p. 5; Meier, *Rethinking the Historical Jesus: A Marginal Jew. Volume 2*, p. 652.

115. Gundry, *Mark*, p. 252. Cf. Collins, *Mark*, p. 271.

ral laws.¹¹⁶ This approach may have been influenced by a pervasive anti-supernaturalistic understanding of miracles in the modern world.¹¹⁷ However, if the swine incident is part of the exorcism, common sense does not seem necessary in understanding such a supernatural phenomenon.

5. Conclusion

This paper has investigated the extent to which Mark's account of Jesus' encounter with the Gerasene demoniac is historically plausible. Instead of holding form-critical assumptions, this study employs various ways to examine the whole account in light of recent discussions on criteria of historicity, the genre of Gospels, eyewitness testimony and memory studies. According to the analysis of the literary features in 5.1-20, Mark may have consulted with trustworthy eyewitnesses about their memories of the encounter. This affirms that Mark's account is historically plausible mostly at the gist level and to some extent at the detail level, considering that long-term memories are based more on gist memory than verbatim memory. Moreover, from the historical analysis, this study finds that in the early first century CE, the social and religious tensions between the territories of Antipas and those of Philip coexisted with stable commercial relations. Jesus' journey across the sea largely fits the geographical, economic, and social relations between Upper Galilee and the Decapolis. Finally, through the interaction with major objections, this study has strengthened Twelftree's view that form-critical presuppositions behind the rejection of the historicity of the swine incident are questionable.

116. Blomberg categorizes it as "the scientific objection" which means that 'the discovery of the natural, physical laws by which the universe operates has proved them impossible' (*Historical Reliability*, p. 105).

117. See Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), pp. 86-107.