

Exorcising Trauma: Jesus, Roman Militarism, and the Gerasene Demoniac (Mark 5:1-20)

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Abstract

The following reading of the Gerasene Demoniac makes a case for this event as an exorcism performed by Jesus. The strongly religious elements of Roman military life provide a starting point. The history of Roman military presence within the Decapolis makes the identity of the Demoniac as a victim of some form of military trauma plausible. The appropriateness of a biopsychosocial model of healing, rather than a biomedical one, is then reviewed. That the healing might then be located within the sphere of the demonic or supernatural as an exorcism is then ascertained by noting the deeply spiritual elements of Roman military life and identity. The Demoniac as presented as a victim of Roman imperial policy who is restored to wholeness by Jesus. What is envisioned here is visible elsewhere in the NT: a challenge to social and political convention by his personal authority rather than political might.

Keywords: Gerasene Demoniac, exorcism, Roman militarism, Genii, Fides

1. Introduction*

The healing of the Gerasene demoniac invites consideration in light of Roman militarism, at least in two variants. The Marcan version is the focus here: the Matthean variant (Matthew 8:28–34) does not identify the unclean spirit as Legion (Mark 5:8–9; also in Luke 8:29–30), a critical step in the interpretation offered.¹ Mark 5:1–20 may be read as a critique of Roman militarism,² in which the consequences of such a culture are revealed and transformed in an encounter with Jesus. Such a reading demands that case be made for the demoniac as a victim of militarism and for Jesus as a solution to its ills. The first asks that two phenomena be potentially present. First is the identification of the demoniac as a victim of militarism. This necessitates an historical examination of Roman military presence, and that the ancient world recognised militarism as a source of trauma. The second, how an exorcism might engage with ancient understandings of such phenomena as militarism embracing both a this-worldly and a supernatural dimension.

Of course, the episode may well be read in other ways: psychologically,³ or as an anticipation of both the resurrection and/or the realisation of a cosmic struggle.⁴ These themes all remain and are not consumed or banished by focus on trauma and the Roman military.

2. Locating the Event

The location of the miracle is problematic. Gerasa is the preferred reading in Mark 5:1 and Luke 8:26, Gadara in Matthew 8:28. Whilst the distance of Gerasa from the lake may be a complication,⁵ Craig S. Keener suggests that these are not precise locations but “simply

* A draft version of this paper was read at SNTS 2024, Melbourne. I am grateful to Prof. Gabrielle Gelardini, Dr. Alistair C. Stewart and the peer reviewers for their comments. Any errors remain all my own work.

¹ The Matthean account posits two afflicted persons (Matthew 8:28–34).

² Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Magic: Freeing the Gospel Stories from Modern Misconceptions* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 145–146.

³ Michael Willett Newheart, “My Name is Legion”: *The Story and Soul of the Gerasene Demoniac* (Interfaces. Cleeveville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 53–69. For mental illness; Christine J. Guth, “An Insider’s Look at the Gerasene Disciple (Mark 5:1-20): Biblical Interpretation from the Social Location of Mental Illness.” *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 11/4 (2007): 61–70.

⁴ Eugene M. Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (The New Testament Library. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 204–205 (E-book); Sanghwan Lee, “Jesus vs Seth-Typhon: An Audience-Critical Approach to Mark 4:35–5:20.” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 75/2 (2024): 320–335; Hans M. Moscicke, “The Gerasene Exorcism and Jesus’ Eschatological Expulsion of Cosmic Powers: Echoes of Second Temple Scapegoat Traditions in Mark 5.1-20,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41/3 (2019): 363–383.

⁵ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33A. Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1993), 224; see further, Gabriella

identify the region”.⁶ They emphasise a non-Jewish setting.⁷ If this is so, rather than giving an exact location, a site in the Decapolis may be all that is indicated, with a recognition of Mark not knowing the geography, and Matthew attempting a still problematic correction.⁸ The difficulty in identifying the place exactly warns against claiming a detailed reconstruction.⁹

Such details may equally support an historical account or a fictive one with some grounding in a reality recognisable to the audience. Whether viewed as historical or fictive, it still communicates a message. It is always possible that “the myth, the fiction, the poetry are, ... , the superordinate constituents of the texts. Fiction is mainly how they are about that about which they are” (Templeton: 151).¹⁰ There is no need to choose history or fiction: “he [Mark] is offering us some third thing, a τρίτον γένος (*triton genos*, a ‘third kind’), that allows both literary and historical analysis”.¹¹ Put another way, the reading which follows “does not claim any representation of an actual event, but recognizes that the narrative is embedded in, assumes, and inscribes cultural ideological, social, and political structures from the world in which it originates”.¹²

3. Roman Military Presence in Syria and the Decapolis

Roman military presence affected the urbanisation of both Syria and Mesopotamia in two ways: the deployment of soldiers on active service near regional towns and cities, and veteran colonisation, in which demobilised veterans were settled in the area.¹³ Nigel Pollard identifies five legionary bases near five cities in Roman Syria: “Zeugma, Cyrrhus, Apamea on the

Gelardini, *Christus Militans: Studien zur politisch-militärischen Semantik im Markusevangelium vor dem Hintergrund des ersten jüdisch-römischen Kriegen* (NovTSup 165. Leiden: Brill, 2016), 161–162.

⁶ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew : A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 282.

⁷ Mary Ann Beavis, *Mark* (PCNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 93.

⁸ Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26* (WBC 34A. Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1989), 275–277; W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew Vol. 2: VIII–XVIII* (ICC. Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1991), 79.

⁹ Joseph S. Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX* (AB 28. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 737.

¹⁰ Douglas A. Templeton, *The New Testament as True Fiction: Literature, Literary Criticism, Aesthetics* (Playing the Texts. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 151.

¹¹ Templeton, *The New Testament as True Fiction*, 151.

¹² Warren Carter, 2015. “Cross-Gendered Romans and Mark's Jesus: Legion Enters the Pigs (Mark 5:1–20)”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134 (1): 139–155.

¹³ Nigel Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 38–39.

Orontes, Samosata, and Raphanaea”.¹⁴ With the exception of the last, all had previously had Hellenistic military associations.¹⁵ There is evidence of further military presence at other sites: Beroea, Tyre, Sidon and Damascus, though much of the evidence comes from the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE.¹⁶ There is evidence for a documented colony of veterans at Ptolemais, founded by Claudius, circa 53 CE.¹⁷

Most significantly for the argument being developed here are three first century CE funerary inscriptions for cavalrymen from a Thracian squadron which have been found at Gerasa.¹⁸ Such a unit (an *ala*) would have numbered about 450 in strength: a Claudian inscription (*Ch LA xi n501*) counts 434 soldiers and 12 decurions.¹⁹ Thus, there is extant evidence for a military presence in the area around Gerasa which might offer an origin for the demoniac as one affected directly or indirectly by militarism.²⁰

Records show military operations and campaigns in the territories predate the Principate and persist into the formative period of the gospels.²¹ Military activity during the Jewish War of

¹⁴ Pollard, *Soldiers*, 39. Graham Webster, *The Roman Imperial Army of the First and Second Centuries A.D.* (3rd Edition. Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1985) notes 3 or 4 legions in Syria in the time of Augustus (25), and that the proximity of Parthia indicates a continued military presence (34–35, 40, 43–44, 65). Israel Shatzman, “The Beginning of the Defensive System in Judaea” Pages 37–66 in *Essential Essays for the Study of the Military in First-century Palestine: Soldiers and the New Testament Context*, ed. Christopher B. Zeichman (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019) 37–66 identifies the problems of using Ptolemy’s *Geography* and archeological data to reconstruct the presence of Roman military sites in Palestine during the Flavian period.

¹⁵ Pollard, *Soldiers*, 40.

¹⁶ Pollard, *Soldiers*, 42, 43.

¹⁷ Pollard, *Soldiers*, 62.

¹⁸ Welles, C.B. “The Inscriptions” in Gerasa: City of the Decapolis, An Account Embodying the Record of a Joint Excavation by Yale University and the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem (1928–1930), and Yale University and the American Schools of Oriental Research (1930–1931, 1933–1934) ed. Carl H. Kraeling (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938), 355–494, here at 446–447.

¹⁹ Karen R. Dixon and Pat Southern, *The Roman Cavalry from the First to the Third Century AD* (London, UK: Routledge, 1992), 23; see further, Thomas R.S. Broughton, “The Roman Army” in *Essential Essays for the Study of the Military in First-century Palestine: Soldiers and the New Testament Context*, ed. Christopher B. Zeichman. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019), 1–25.

²⁰ I. Howard. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC. Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1978), 338–339. There is an unattributed suggestion that the demoniac’s suffering may originate with a childhood experience at the hands of the military. It is not linked to the comments of Jeremias which Marshall queries about Legion, “My name is ‘Soldier’” (Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to The Nations: The Franz Delitzsch Lectures for 1953*, trans. Samuel H. Hooke (SBT 24. London, UK: SCM, 1958), 30–31, fn.5.

²¹ Jonathan P. Roth, “Jews and the Roman Army: Perceptions and Realities” in *The Impact of the Roman Army (200 BC–AD 476): Economic, Social, Political, Religious, and Cultural Aspects*, ed. Lukas de Blois and Elio Lo Cascio. IMEM. Leuven: Brill, 2006) 409–420, here at 413–418; further Edward Dąbrowa, “The Roman Army in

the 60s CE which saw troops loyal to the empire moving through the provinces of Syria, Judaea, and Palestine would also be significant (Roth 2019).²² Of particular significance here is Josephus:

“He also sent Lucius Annius to Gerasa with a squadron of cavalry and a considerable body of infantry. Annius, having carried the city by assault, put to the sword a thousand of the youth who had not already escaped, made prisoners of women and children, gave his soldiers licence to plunder the property, and then set fire to the houses and advanced against the surrounding villages. The able-bodied fled, the feeble perished, and everything left was consigned to the flames.”²³

Noting that this event has been questioned,²⁴ it may still provide a further instance of Roman militarism, a possible comparison of Vespasian and Jesus, and therefore a potential *Sitz im Leben* for the Marcan audience.²⁵ The same issues of history, fiction and true fiction persist here as well as in relation to Jesus.

Jewish recruitment and participation in Roman military life may also be reckoned as a potential factor informing the account: the geographic indicators (already reckoned as problematic) are likely supported by experiences of the intended audiences as sources of meaning, and Jews lived in Syria as well as the more recognisably Jewish regions and provinces. Terms like “Roman”, “Syrian”, and “Jew” resist clear definitions and may be confused.²⁶

The evidence given shows both a military presence within the context of the event, and more widely. No surprise given that Roman militarism was, at this stage, “pervasive”, if not ubiquitous.²⁷

Action in Judaea (4BCE–66CE)”in *Ad Fines Imperii Romani: Studia Thaddaeo Sarnowski Septuagenario ab Amicis, Collegis Discipulisque Dedicata*. Edited by Agnieszka Tomas. Warsaw: Instytut Archeologii UW, 2015), 59–68; Joshua Garroway, “The Invasion of a Mustard Seed: A Reading of Mark 5.1–20,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 32/1 (2009): 57–75, here at 63, fn. 13 .

²² Jonathan P. Roth, “Jewish Military Forces in the Roman Service” in *Essential Essays for the Study of the Military in First-century Palestine: Soldiers and the New Testament Context*, edited by Christopher B. Zeichman. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019.

²³ Josephus, *B.J.* 4.487–489. Translation from Josephus, *The Jewish War, Volume II: Books 3–4*, trans. Henry St. J. Thackeray (LCL 487. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 301; Carter, “Cross-Gendered Romans”, 144.

²⁴ Hans Leander, *Discourses of Empire: The Gospel of Mark From a Postcolonial Perspective* (Semeia Studies 71. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 214.

²⁵ Leander, *Discourses*, 214; Carter, “Cross-Gendered Romans”, 143–144; Adam Winn, *The Purpose of Mark’s Gospel: An Early Christian Response to Roman Imperial Propaganda*. WUNT 2/245. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 178–179, 184.

²⁶ Roth, “Jews”, 410.

²⁷ Eli J. S. Weaverdyck, “Chapter 7. The Roman Empire” in *Handbook of Ancient Afro-Eurasian Economies*:

4. Ancient Militarism and Trauma

With the recognition of a military presence in the area, it is appropriate to consider whether the ancient world would have known what our contemporary thinking identifies as trauma, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the military cultures of antiquity.

“Trauma” is not easily defined.²⁸ As an example, the Australian Psychological Society offers:

“Potentially traumatic events are powerful and upsetting incidents that intrude into daily life. They are usually experiences which are life threatening or pose a significant threat to a person’s physical or psychological wellbeing.”²⁹

The modern term of course, is not to be imported anachronistically, There is more value in comparing symptoms with phenomena described in ancient accounts. So, attention turns to the symptoms of trauma. A number of behaviours may result:

“Symptoms of trauma can be described as physical, cognitive (thinking), behavioural (things we do) and emotional.

Physical symptoms can include excessive alertness (always on the look-out for signs of danger), being easily startled, fatigue/exhaustion, disturbed sleep and general aches and pains.

Cognitive (thinking) symptoms can include intrusive thoughts and memories of the event, visual images of the event, nightmares, poor concentration and memory, disorientation and confusion.

Behavioural symptoms can include avoidance of places or activities that are reminders of the event, social withdrawal and isolation and loss of interest in normal activities.

Emotional symptoms can include fear, numbness and detachment, depression, guilt, anger and irritability, anxiety and panic.”³⁰

The description of the demoniac (Mark 5:3–5) resonates with these symptoms and suggests analogues with ancient accounts of military trauma. Accounts from ancient Mesopotamia

Volume 1: Contexts, ed. Sitta Reden (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2007), 241–304, here at 292–293. See also the overview in Albert L. A. Hogeterp, “Trauma and Its Ancient Literary Representation: Mark 5,1-20,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche* 111/1 (2020): 1–32, here at 14–20.

²⁸ Selma Leydesdorff, Graham Dawson, Natasha Burchardt and T.G. Ashplant. “Introduction: Trauma and Life Stories” in *Trauma and Life Stories*, ed. Kim Lacy Rogers and Selma Leydesdorff with Graham Dawson (Routledge Studies in Memory and Narrative. London, UK: Routledge, 2002), 1–26, here at 1.

²⁹ Australian Psychological Society, “Trauma,” <https://psychology.org.au/for-the-public/psychology-topics/trauma>. Accessed 24 December 2024.

³⁰ Australian Psychological Society, “Trauma”.

recognise a number of traumas, including those associated with militarism.³¹

A variety of ancient Hellenistic texts seem to address the phenomenon, notably, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and Euripides' *Heracles*.³² Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen* describes symptoms observed during and after battle:

“And it has already happened that some people, seeing frightening things, have been driven out from their present mind (*phronêma*) in the present moment: in this way fear has extinguished and expelled thought (*noêma*). And many have fallen victim to groundless sufferings, terrible diseases, and incurable madnesses.”³³

The passage, though lacking in detail, indicates both immediate and long-term symptoms of trauma. Herodotus also records the account of Epizelus:

“[A] certain Athenian, Epizelus son of Cuphagoras, while he fought doughtily in the mellay [*sic*] lost the sight of his eyes, albeit neither stabbed in any part nor shot, and for the rest of his life continued blind from that day. I heard that he told the tale of this mishap thus: a tall man-at-arms (he said) encountered him, whose beard spread all over his shield; this apparition passed Epizelus by, but slew his neighbour in the line.”³⁴

Alan Greaves notes that diagnosis from such a text is difficult. PTSD is one possible explanation of Epizelus's symptoms: others include hysterical blindness or Conversion Disorder.³⁵ Xenophon's account of Clearchus (*Anabasis*, 2.16.1–15) includes possible symptoms of some disorder related to war:

“...for he was gloomy in appearance and harsh in voice, and he used to punish severely, sometimes in anger, so that on occasion he would be sorry afterwards...for they said that at such times his gloominess appeared to be brightness in the faces of others, and his severity seemed to be resolution against the enemy, so that it appeared to betoken safety and to be no

³¹ Walid Khalid Abdul-Hamid and Jamie Hacker Hughes “Nothing New under the Sun: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders in the Ancient World”, *Early Science and Medicine* 19/6 (2014): 549–557, here at 554–556.

³² Yulia Ustinova and Etzel Cardeña, “Combat Stress Disorders and their Treatment in Ancient Greece,” *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 6/6 (2014): 739–748, here at 741.

³³ Gorgias, *Hel.* 17. Translation from “Sophists”, *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume VIII: Sophists, Part 1*, ed. and trans. André Laks, Glenn W. Most (LCL 531. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 183; see also, Daniel W. Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics. Vol. 2*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 760–761.

³⁴ Herodotus, *Hist.* 6.117. Translation from Herodotus, *The Persian Wars, Volume III: Books 5–7*, trans. Alfred D. Godley (LCL 119. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922), 271.

³⁵ Alan M. Greaves, “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) In Ancient Greece: A Methodological Review” in *Warfare and Society in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*. Papers arising from a Colloquium held at the University of Liverpool, 13th June 2008, ed. Stephen O'Brien and Daniel Boatright. BAR International Series 2583/2013. Oxford, UK: Archeopress, 2013), 89–100, here at 96.

longer severity.”³⁶

The Latin poet Lucretius also seems to describe military-related PTSD:

“Moreover, the minds of men, which with mighty motions accomplish mighty feats, often do and carry out the same things in dreams: kings win victories, are captured, join battle, cry aloud as if their throats were being cut on the spot. Many struggle violently, groan with pain, and, as if they were being gnawed in the jaws of a panther or cruel lion, make the place ring with their cries.”³⁷

Aislinn Melchior is cautious about the extent of PTSD in Roman culture noting that Roman soldiers were likely to experience events which might well trigger trauma: “witnessing horrific events and/or being in mortal danger and/or the act of killing - especially close kills where the reality of one's responsibility cannot be doubted”.³⁸ However, other factors are also at play: the nature of warfare, in particular the concussive and sonic elements of modern weaponry, attitudes to violence, and degrees of sensitivity to it may alter the frequency with which PTSD occurs.³⁹ That said, a lower rate of occurrence does not mean an absence.⁴⁰ Alan Greaves is also cautious against an overly quick diagnosis of PTSD, but concludes that “it is possible to suggest that in ancient Greece PTSD, Conversion Disorder and other traumatic stress conditions were not rare but, in fact, completely ubiquitous”.⁴¹

The precise diagnosis of PTSD in antiquity is, thus, elusive, but plausible. The measured conclusions of Lawrence Tritle about Clearchus are apposite:

³⁶ Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 2.16.1–15. Translation from Xenophon, *Anabasis*, trans. Carleton L. Brownson; revd. John Dillery (LCL 90. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 205, 207. Hippocrates also appears to identify a case of PTSD, but not in a military setting: Hippocrates, *Epid.* 3.142. Translation from Hippocrates, *Ancient Medicine. Airs, Waters, Places. Epidemics 1 and 3. The Oath. Precepts. Nutriment*, ed. and trans. Paul Potter (LCL 147. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 81; further Abdul-Hamid and Hughes, “Nothing New”, 551.

³⁷ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 4. 1011–1017. Translation from Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. William H. D. Rouse; revd. Martin F. Smith (LCL 181. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), 355. Roman attitudes might focus on physical signs- what Korneel van Lommel identifies as impairment and disfigurement. These lead to marginalisation as they might be considered sources of bad luck or of being “misshapen and morally inferior”; Korneel van Lommel, “Heroes and Outcasts: Ambiguous Attitudes Towards Impaired and Disfigured Roman Veterans,” *The Classical World* 109/1 (2015): 91–117, here at 93. For men, marks of conflict might be ambiguous: marks of bravery, or of a loss of masculinity; those on the front of the body suggested bravery, whereas those on the back might indicate cowardice (94–96, 101–105).

³⁸ Aislinn Melchior, “Caesar in Vietnam: Did Roman Soldiers Suffer From Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?” *Greece and Rome* 58/2 (2011): 209–223, here at 217.

³⁹ Greaves, “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder”, 94–95.

⁴⁰ Melchior, “Caesar”, 223.

⁴¹ Greaves, “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder”, 95–98; Melchior, “Caesar”, 217–218.

“Xenophon may not have understood exactly why Clearchus was troubled, but he clearly sensed that he was and that the reasons for this were to be found in his long years of service as a soldier.”⁴²

It may also be worth noting that military associated trauma need not be restricted to those involved in military service. Philip Esler has identified a number of texts which illustrate the ways in which Roman military personnel might be free to brutalise the local populace (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 9.39; Juvenal, *Satire* 16).⁴³ Whilst these indicate a certain heavy-handedness, they may need to be tempered by other data which record integration into local communities.⁴⁴

This may be as much as we can speak of the demoniac. Possession may also be a means of describing trauma:

The Gerasene demoniac has occasionally been considered as an example of a traumatized person, from a psycho-analytical viewpoint of individual introjection of traumatizing experiences that lead to dissociative disorders...Trauma is also conceptualized in terms of possession: “(a traumatic) scene or thought is not a possessed knowledge, but itself possesses, at will, the one it inhabits”.⁴⁵

The gospel texts give no precise indication of physical marks on the demoniac, but Mark 5:5's detail of self-harm would suggest aversion or shame rather than pride and admiration, as would the separation from society by physical restraint, and living amongst the tombs, mountains and/or desert (variously in Matthew 8:28; Mark 5:3, 5; Luke 8:27, 29):⁴⁶ an unclean place and an unclean behaviour.⁴⁷ Indeed, his location and behaviour suggest that he may be further identified with the dead and excessive mourning.⁴⁸ So does his recurring behaviour:

If applied to the question of the traumatized person in Mark 5,1-20, insistent return of possession may well be implied in Mark's narration. Mark 5,2b-3 includes the observation that “no one could bind him anymore (οὐκέτι), even with a chain” (5,3, RSV). Behind Mark's description of demonic possession is an implied process of deterioration of the person's situation from communal acts of restraining and binding him to his complete isolation from

⁴² Lawrence A. Tritle, “Xenophon's portrait of Clearchus: A Study in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” in *Xenophon and His World: Papers from a conference held in Liverpool in July 1999*, ed. Christopher Tuplin and Vincent Azoulay (Historia Einzelschriften 172. Stuttgart, Franz Steiner, 2004), 325–339, here at 336.

⁴³ Philip Esler, “Reading Matthew by the Dead Sea: Matthew 8:5–13 in Light of P. Yadin 11,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 70/1 (2014): 1–12, here at 3.

⁴⁴ Richard Alston, *Soldier and Society in Ancient Egypt: A Social History* (London: Routledge, 2014), 67; Esler, “Reading Matthew”, 5.

⁴⁵ Hogeterp, “Trauma”, 5.

⁴⁶ Guelich, *Mark*, 278.

⁴⁷ Newheart, 2004, 42–43.

⁴⁸ Hogeterp, “Trauma”, 8–9.

any social environment, living among the tombs. Mark 5,4 further relates the demoniac's past in terms of repeated (πολλάκις) unsuccessful attempts of others to bind and subdue him.⁴⁹

The identification of the unclean spirit with "Legion", meaning the Roman army, (Mark 5:9; Luke 8:30) potentially indicates some criticism of the military.⁵⁰ Some go further, seeing a reference to the Tenth Legion, whose mascot was a boar, and had been garrisoned in Jerusalem during the Jewish War.⁵¹ At some point, the story has picked up, by referring to "legion", "anti-Roman, antiwar" overtones.⁵²

5. Healing and Exorcism

The casting out of spirits (Mark 5: 1, 8, 12–13, 15–16, 18) may be problematic for modern readers. This particular episode contains some fantastical images that many academics would view as fictitious.⁵³ Today's reader may need to *unthink*, to use Owen Barfield's term, if the text is to be read in context:

"Unless he has enough imagination, and enough power of detachment from the established meanings or thought-forms of his own civilization, to enable him to grasp the meanings of the fundamental terms— unless, in fact, he has the power not only of thinking, but of *unthinking*— he will simply re-interpret everything they say in terms of subsequent thought."⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Hogeterp, "Trauma", 25.

⁵⁰ Beavis, *Mark*, 93–94, but not necessarily the occupation of Palestine: Warren Carter, *Mark* (Wisdom 42. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2019), 114; Mikael C. Parsons, *Luke* (PCNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 140.

⁵¹ David E. Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel: Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God*. Biblical Theology of the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2015), 275 fn. 73 notes that Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.18.9-10 refer to soldiery from the Twelfth Legion rather than the Tenth (Josephus, *The Jewish War, Volume I: Books 1–2*, trans. Henry St. J. Thackeray (LCL 203. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1927), 516–521; see also *Jewish War* 7.1.3 (Josephus, *The Jewish War, Volume III: Books 5–7*, trans. Henry St. J. Thackeray (LCL 210. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 312–313. For the Tenth Legion, see Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.1.2–3 (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 307–311; Carter, "Cross-Gendered Romans", 153–154; Garroway, "The Invasion", 65; Gelardini, *Christus Militans*, 165–167; Markus Lau, "Die Legio X Fretensis und der Besessene von Gerasa. Anmerkungen zur Zahlenangabe "ungefähr Zweitausend" (Mk 5,13)," *Biblica* 88 (2007): 351–364, here at 354; Paul Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus* (SJ 1. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1961), 129; Boring, *Mark*, 205–207 (E-Book); Hogeterp, "Trauma", 19–20 rejects the interpretation as a caricature or parody.

⁵² Boring, *Mark*, 204–205 (E-Book). For anti-Roman; Rowland Onyenali, "The Markan Proskuneo (Mark 5:6; 15:19) as Anti-Roman Motif in Mark's Gospel." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 52/2 (2022): 77–87.

⁵³ Leander, *Discourses*, 209.

⁵⁴ Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (Oxford, UK: Barfield Press, 2009), 129; see also, Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson and

Richard A. Horsley has identified this issue in reference to accounts in the gospels identified as miraculous or magical.⁵⁵ This, in part, arises from modern biomedical patterns of healing and curing.⁵⁶ Biomedical paradigms for healing dominate today's Western world, reflecting a Cartesian mind-body dualism which separates physical from mental and social worlds.⁵⁷ In contrast, biopsychosocial models reject a mind body-dualism and see healing as "much more the result of a complex set of factors than merely medical, chemical, or surgical intervention".⁵⁸

Ancient conceptualities tend more toward the biopsychosocial. Such a model includes elements which might be identified as spiritual, given that many institutions and phenomena of antiquity were considered to have two aspects:

"Every Power tends to have a visible pole, an outer form — be it a church, a nation or an economy — and an invisible pole, an inner spirit or driving force that animates, legitimates and regulates its physical manifestation in the world. Neither pole is the cause of the other. Both come into existence together and cease to exist together. When a particular power becomes idolatrous, placing itself above God's purposes for the good of the whole, then that Power becomes demonic."⁵⁹

Thus, the restoration of a person to wholeness may involve an engagement with spiritual and physical realities as identified. Both healing and exorcism, the matters with which Jesus is engaged in this pericope, are part of this process: they mark a particular Judaic practice, which can be seen in both Josephus and the Dead Sea Literature.⁶⁰ Evidence for the healing of the demoniac includes a spiritual dimension, even if viewed under the lens of trauma. This also demands a re-assessment of the Roman military- and how it might be reckoned as both a physical and spiritual entity.

trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 61. *Unthinking* asks such readers to question both the reductionist marginalisation of indigenous readings (Leander, *Discourses*, 209), and "the critical distance between those who create narratives and the scholarly community analysing them"; thus, Katherine Southwood, *Job's body and the dramatised comedy of moralising* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 26).

⁵⁵ Horsley, *Jesus and Magic*, 63.

⁵⁶ Horsley, *Jesus and Magic*, 31–32.

⁵⁷ Pieter F. Craffert, *The Life of a Galilean Shaman: Jesus of Nazareth in Anthropological-Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2008), 251–252.

⁵⁸ Craffert, *The Life of a Galilean Shaman*, 262.

⁵⁹ Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984), 5.

⁶⁰ Hogeterp, "Trauma", 21–24.

6. The Roman Army: A Physical, Spiritual and Religious Entity

The Roman military would not have been viewed as a purely physical, material or this-worldly entity. The army had a pluriform religious identity which could accommodate official religion, approved cults, acceptable local cults, and deities of particular places.⁶¹ It also included the symbolism of the *aquila* (eagle) and other emblems, and empirically visible from the first century BCE.⁶² Legionaries would die in defence of the *aquila*, perhaps because it symbolised their *esprit de corps*, a religious function, or embodied the *genius* of the legion, where *genii* are “the multitude of the more shapeless powers and spirits that held in their care every action and event, every person and every place”.⁶³ This last may be described as “the sum of one's vitality, energy, and capability of enjoyment, in short for his personality and his higher, inner self”.⁶⁴

Military *genii* were “so manifold and plentiful that one has rightly said no other manifestation of Roman life left more remains of the cult of the Genii than the army”.⁶⁵ These included *genii* of military units and divisions, military deities, non-commissioned officers and their clubs, as well as military installations.⁶⁶ Genii were connected to the *sacramentum* (an oath of obedience made by recruits):⁶⁷

“*Genio sacramenti, veterani.*”

The inscription, no doubt, refers to the oath of service, worshipped as a deity by soldiers. A hint for the interpretation of this Genius is found in Apuleius' 'Metamorphoses' (9, 41) where a

⁶¹ Eric Birley, “The Religion of the Roman Army: 1985–1977”, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II 16.2 (1978): 1506–1541; Georgia L. Irby-Massie, “Army Cult, Roman” in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall, Kai Brodersen, Craige B. Champion, Andrew Erskine and Sabine R. Huebner (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 736–737; Graham Webster, *The Roman Imperial Army of the First and Second Centuries A.D.* (3rd Edition. Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1985), 275–279.

⁶² Benjamin J.R. Greet, “The Roman Eagle: A Symbol and its Evolution.” Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds (2015): 52. The eagle may be symbol of a number of Roman deities including Jupiter, Vulcan, and Sol (81–83, 129–130, and linked to divination (89).

⁶³ Michael P. Speidel and Alexandra Dimitrova-Milčeva, “The Cult of the Genii in the Roman Army and a New Military Deity” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II 16.2 (1978): 1542–1555, here at 1542; Greet, “The Roman Eagle”, 89–98; Earl S. Johnson, “Mark 15,39 and the So-Called Confession of the Roman Centurion” *Biblica* 81/3 (2000): 406–413, here at 409.

⁶⁴ Speidel and Dimitrova-Milčeva, “The Cult”, 1543.

⁶⁵ Speidel and Dimitrova-Milčeva, “The Cult”, 1543.

⁶⁶ Speidel and Dimitrova-Milčeva, “The Cult”, 1544–1551.

⁶⁷ Louis Rawlings, “Army and Battle during the Conquest of Italy (350–264 BC)” in *A Companion to the Roman Army*, ed. Paul Erdkamp (Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World. Chichester: Blackwell, 2011), 45–62, here at 51.

soldier is described as in fear of the *Genius sacramenti* because he lost his sword: *militaris...sacramenti Genium ob amissam spatham verebatur*. Important for military discipline, the *Genius sacramenti* here functions as an externalized conscience, a role the less personifiable oath itself could have taken only with difficulty.”⁶⁸

The status of the *genius* gives an additional layer of authority. The plurality of *genii* alone might provide a rationale for the “Legion” as both singular and plural (Mark 5:2, 8, 9, 13): one Legion, many *genii*.

In the early imperial period, the military *aquila* which was linked closely to the *imagines* (images of the emperor).⁶⁹ Other military standards were linked to deities like Mars Ultor and Vesta.⁷⁰

Military religious activity likely included cultic and sacrificial elements:

“Worship, especially sacrifice, was the system of communication between men and the gods, whereby each was supposed to get what he deserved...one may argue that the entire military life of Rome was, implicitly or explicitly, a religious phenomenon.”⁷¹

What emerges is the identification of a military spiritual pole which might well be described as a spirit or demon, given the diversity of spiritual entities whose worship was practised. Military religious activity potentially included:

“[t]he cult of the standards, the use of the sacred oath (*sacramentum*), the importance of the military religious calendar, the veneration of various abstractions (virtues) such as *Eirene*, *Themis*, *Pax*, *Virtus* and Victory, as well as the importance of specifically military *Genii*...”⁷²

One further *genius* may be added: *Fides* (faith, loyalty, allegiance) – a hallmark of military life which likely included a religious dimension.⁷³ *Fides*, like other virtues or qualities, might be termed a “conceptual deity”.⁷⁴ In the Flavian period, “*Fides* appears prominently as a theme associated with the aftermath of civil war and as part of an attempt by new emperors to consolidate their position among the army and people of Rome”.⁷⁵ More widely, it was a

⁶⁸ Speidel and Dimitrova-Milčeva, “The Cult”, 1547–1548.

⁶⁹ Greet, “The Roman Eagle”, 141.

⁷⁰ Greet, “The Roman Eagle”, 142.

⁷¹ John Helgeland, “Roman Army Religion,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II 16.2 (1978): 1470–1505, here at 1471. It made an “all-inclusive system” (1500).

⁷² Johnson, “Mark 15,39”, 409–410; see further, Helgeland, “Roman Army Religion”, 1473–1488. It produced an “all-inclusive system” (1500).

⁷³ Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 77–85.

⁷⁴ Daniele Miano, *Fortuna: Deity and Concept in Archaic and Republican Italy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 7.

⁷⁵ Claire Stocks, “Broken Bonds: Perfidy and the Discourse of Civil War” in *Fides in Flavian Literature*, ed.

significant component of military behaviour:

“Few relationships in Graeco-Roman societies are so often or so positively described with the language of *pistis/fides* as those between armies and the state and army commanders and their troops... At the same time, we occasionally catch a hint that relationships of military *pistis/fides* cannot be taken for granted and need to be worked at—and not only because the loyalty of armed forces is formally created and maintained by that most potent reification of *différance*, the military oath of allegiance.”⁷⁶

At Gerasa, there is a clear identification of an unclean spirit or demons (Mark 5: 2, 8, 13; Luke 8:27, 29, 30, 33). The connection to militarism is suggested by vocabulary throughout: ““Legion” has only a military association”, ἀγέλη (Mark 5:11 – a multitude, possibly “a band of trainees”), ἐπέτρεπεν (Mark 5:13 – of a military command) and ὄρμησεν (Mark 5:13 – rushed as a herd – of an uncharacteristically porcine, but potentially military, manoeuvre.⁷⁷ A poetic layer of meaning has also been postulated: the Hebrew גָּרַשׁ may be translated as “banish”, “drive out”, “cast out”.⁷⁸

Under the postulated reading, the tomb-dweller is freed from the control of spirits which bind them to the spiritual realities of the military and its *genii*. Further identification is elusive. The demoniac might be a traumatized veteran: physically, or morally,⁷⁹ even potentially an “instigator of violence”.⁸⁰ But, veterans were not the only victims of militarism: the demoniac might equally be a non-combatant – a subordinate or victim of the Roman “Land Empire”

Antony Augoustakos, Emma Buckley, and Claire Stocks (Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Stocks, 2019), 21–44, here at 23; for *Fides* as a deity on coins, 31.

⁷⁶ Morgan, *Roman Faith*, 77–78. The *genius sacramenti* likely was the oath of allegiance; Speidel and Dimitrova-Milčeva, “The Cult”, 1547–1548).

⁷⁷ J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Contributions to the study of the Gerasene demoniac,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 2/3 (1979): 2–17, here at 5; see also Carter, “Cross-Gendered”, 140–141, 144–145; Garroway, “The Invasion”, 60–63, 66; Gelardini, *Christus Militans*, 165–166; Leander, *Discourses*, 206; Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 182–183. For an overview, Leander, *Discourses*, 203–207.

⁷⁸ Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament. Bible in the Modern World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 28; also, Carter, “Cross-Gendered Romans”, 143; Leander, *Discourses*, 212.

⁷⁹ Michael Yandell, “Hope in the Void: How veterans with moral injury can help us face reality.” *Plough Quarterly* 8 (2021). <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/justice/nonviolence/hope-in-the-void>; Brad E. Kelle, *The Bible and Moral Injury : Reading Scripture Alongside War's Unseen Wounds* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2020), 46.

⁸⁰ Michael Yandell, ““Do Not Torment Me”; The Morally Injured Gerasene Demoniac” in *Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts*, ed. Joseph McDonald (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017), 135–149, here at 136–138, quotation from 138.

focused on its own interests.⁸¹ The text does not offer material for a more precise identification.

Furthermore, even if the specific language of πίστις (*fides*, faith) is absent, traces remain. The healed demoniac expresses loyalty or allegiance to Jesus, in wishing to accompany him (Mark 5:18; Luke 8:38). This anticipates the profession to be made by the centurion who witnesses the crucifixion.⁸² Even if denied the chance to follow, the demoniac is to express this new relationship by being obedient, staying in this locale and telling, as requested, of what the Lord/God has done for them (Mark 5:20).⁸³ Any potential prior orientation (πίστις/*fides*), whether voluntary or involuntary, to the military has been removed. Such suffering need not be the consequence of sin or choice by the demoniac. It may be “explained as being ineffable (the reason is unknown but a reason exists), or as incidental or just ‘happens’”.⁸⁴ There may be more indicated than either healing or some superiority to Rome: Jesus’s actions may well indicate his superior authority in an apocalyptic struggle between God and Satan.⁸⁵ Indeed, as the wider context shows:

For Mark, the meaning of the story cannot be reduced to an allegory of liberation from the Romans—its horizon is broader than that, within a cosmic and eschatological framework—but it could hardly have been read in Mark’s time without political overtones. It is also important to note that the demons do not ask to remain in the man, but that they not be forced to leave the territory. Jesus’ first foray into Gentile territory not only frees individuals from demonic power but purges the country itself (cf. LaVerdiere, *Beginning*, 1:130). Israel is no longer exclusively the Holy Land—the Christ-event exorcizes Gentile territory; analogous to 7:19, Jesus proleptically makes all lands clean.⁸⁶

The pericope may be making multiple claims: there is no obligation to set these against each other in an opposition when they might well be combined in a hybrid form.

7. Conclusion

The upshot of this train of thought is straightforward, even if not eventually classed as definitive: it is, at best, a possible scenario.

Military presence in the area, given that “the whole region around Gerasa, both valley and mountains, became a war zone by 68 C.E. (Josephus, *Bell.* 4.490)”,⁸⁷ allows the possible

⁸¹ Margaret Moore, “Justice and Colonialism”, *Philosophy Compass* 11/8 (2016): 447–461, here at 448.

⁸² Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (WBC 34B. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 510.

⁸³ Guelich, *Mark*, 285; see also, Luke 8:39; Marshall, *The Gospel*, 341.

⁸⁴ Southwood, *Job’s body*, 7.

⁸⁵ Garland, *A Theology*, 275, fn. 73.

⁸⁶ Boring, *Mark*, 205–207 (E-book).

⁸⁷ Hogeterp, “Trauma”, 25.

identification of the demoniac as one who has been scarred by Roman militarism, either as a combatant or non-combatant. This trauma lends itself to a biospsychosocial framework in which religious and spiritual elements are at play. Jesus' deliverance of the demoniac from the power of an unclean spirit identified as Legion may be viewed as a healing or an exorcism. It accomplishes not just the healing of a psychosomatic condition, but a release from the plural spiritual dimensions of Roman militarism which had wreaked such devastating mental, physical, and social harm on the demoniac (Mark 5: 3–5): Jesus as a foil to Rome or the emperor.⁸⁸ Scholars debate whether the Kingdom with which Jesus would replace Rome will be of a different order or essentially Rome on steroids, as Mark sends contradictory messages.⁸⁹ Jesus's action suggests a critical engagement with those social structures (empire, army, and slavery) which a small movement like emerging Christianity could never, socially, have hoped to dismantle.⁹⁰ If Jesus here challenges the claims of Vespasian,⁹¹ his is a victory over the military achieved by exorcism, by spiritual authority, not military prowess: a qualitative difference. Healing the demoniac replaces violent Roman rule quietly and passively with a "message...of restored life and bestowed mercy".⁹² It further points to victory in a cosmic struggle, of which Rome is only symptomatic.⁹³ Reading the narrative as a τρίτον γένος means that it may embrace both historical and mythic aspirations. The structures of empire (earthly or spiritual) are critiqued, dismantled, and re-orientated one encounter or relationship at a time. Jesus models a strategy for disciples who do not have access to the corridors of power to effect change in their contexts, and reveals his superiority to the powers of this world.

There is a twist in the tail. Desirable though these outcomes may seem now to the modern reader, they were met with resistance. Jesus was asked to leave:

For the demoniac, Jesus' appearance had meant salvation. His neighbors had become accustomed to the status quo and considered Jesus' presence uncomfortable or dangerous.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Leander, *Discourses*, 214–215, also Carter, "Cross-Gendered Romans", 146–147, 149; Winn, *The Purpose*, 184. Carter, "Cross-Gendered Romans", 150–153 further argues for a gendered reading of the exorcism. Moscieke, "The Gerasene Exorcism" grounds it in Judaic Atonement theory and practice.

⁸⁹ Garroway, "The Invasion", 58–59.

⁹⁰ Esler, "Reading Matthew", 10–11 notes that Matthew 8:5–13 may well have provided another challenge to views of Roman militarism through the interaction of Jesus and the centurion.

⁹¹ Winn, *The Purpose*, 184.

⁹² Garroway, "The Invasion", 70–73, here at 70.

⁹³ This resists a demystified reading, pointing solely to Rome as the source of oppression; Newheart, "My Name is Legion", 84. Newheart's conclusion, based on Girard and Fanon, is a modernist reduction which departs from ancient worldviews.

⁹⁴ Boring, *Mark*, 207–208; see further, Hogeterp, "Trauma", 28. The drowning of the swine may be too much for the community to bear: a threat to the "total system" of which they are a part; René Girard, "The Demons of Gerasa" in *The Daemoniac Imagination: Biblical Text and Secular Story*, ed. Robert Detwiler and William G. Doty (AAR Studies in Religion 60. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 77–98, here at 94.

In analogous contexts, similar reactions to the good news may be encountered. The evangelists are nothing if not realistic in their assessments of human nature. Even so, the triumph over death, powers and principalities in the life of the demoniac remains.

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