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Experiencing a Biblical Self-Consuming Artifact: Jesus' Genealogy (Matt 1:2-17)

Abstract: Matt 1:17 indicates that Jesus' genealogy is formed by three series of fourteen generations; however, this total number of generations does not match the preceding list in Matt 1:2-16. Interpreters have proposed multiple ways to understand this inconsistency which have yet to be collected and evaluated. A double literature review displays the limitations of this seemingly insoluble biblical conundrum. This article presents the tension between verse 17 and verses 2-17 of Matthew's gospel as a puzzling reading experience that can best be described, in line with Stanley Fish, as a self-consuming artifact: an experience of incongruity in which the text and the reader are transformed through a process of negation. This approach also highlights other potential reversals in Matthew 1, such as Davidic traditions, that can yield a renewed outlook on this gospel.

Keywords: genealogy, Gospel of Matthew, Matt 1:2-17, reader-response, reception history, self-consuming artifact, Stanley Fish, Davidic messiah

1 Introduction

The number of generations in Matt 1:17 is a typical *crux interpretum* for New Testament scholars. It has generated a large variety of responses from exegetes who try to account for the incongruity of the number of generations in verses 2-16 and verse 17. At first glance, the narrator's arrangement into three series of fourteen generations, as specified in verse 17, gives readers the impression that

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the birth of Jesus is the culmination of the history of Israel.[1] However, this number of generations does not match the immediately preceding list in Matt 1:2-16.

In antiquity, commentators such as Hilary of Poitiers had already observed this discrepancy. Following patristic hermeneutics, Hilary of Poitiers understood the contradiction in the text as grounds for searching for deeper meaning:

> The sequence of the Lord's generation agrees neither with the method of enumeration nor its order of succession so that its rationale of the [present] narrative might be sought. There is a reason why the narration makes one kind of emphasis and the facts say another, and yet another [reason] which is related to the whole, and then another is connected with their enumeration.[2]

Modern exegetes have proposed multiple explanations to account for this inconsistency; although an exhaustive assessment of research to date has not yet been published. The multiple exegetical interpretations indicate a very interesting textual device. Instead of searching for an additional hypothesis, I propose to approach the problem from an innovative angle by adopting a reader-response criticism perspective. This article aims to understand the tension between verse 17 and the preceding list in verses 2-16 as a puzzling reading experience, best described as a self-consuming artifact.

2 Counting Generations

For the purpose of clarification, following Hagner,[3] I propose to count the number of generations [ἐγέννησεν] and the number of names for each section of the genealogy. In the following lists, the numbers on the left denote the number of generations [ἐγέννησεν].

Generations from Abraham to David:

If one excludes women and Zerah, the brother of Perez, there are thirteen generations and fourteen names from Abraham to David:

1. Ἀβραὰμ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἰσαάκ [Abraham fathered Isaac],

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1 See Zhodi Angami, "The Heavenly Canopy: A Reader-response Approach to Matthew's Infancy Narrative from the Tribal Context of North-East India," (Ph.D. diss., Melbourne School of Theology, 2012), 123; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 88 and Daniel Marguerat, *Jésus et Matthieu: À la recherche du Jésus de l'histoire* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2016), 164.

2 Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 42–43.

3 Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 5.

2. Ἰσαὰκ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἰακώβ [Isaac fathered Jacob],
3. Ἰακὼβ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἰούδαν καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς αὐτοῦ [Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers],
4. Ἰούδας δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Φαρὲς καὶ τὸν Ζάρα ἐκ τῆς Θαμάρ [Judah fathered Perez and Zerah by Tamar],
5. Φαρὲς δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἐσρώμ [Perez fathered Hezron],
6. Ἐσρὼμ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἀράμ [Hezron fathered Ram],
7. Ἀρὰμ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἀμιναδάβ [Ram fathered Amminadab],
8. Ἀμιναδὰβ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ναασσών [Amminadab fathered Nahshon],
9. Ναασσὼν δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Σαλμών [Nahshon fathered Salmon],
10. Σαλμὼν δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Βόες ἐκ τῆς Ῥαχάβ [Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab],
11. Βόες δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἰωβὴδ ἐκ τῆς Ῥούθ [Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth],
12. Ἰωβὴδ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἰεσσαί [Obed fathered Jesse],
13. Ἰεσσαὶ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Δαυὶδ τὸν βασιλέα [Jesse fathered David the king].

Generations from David to the deportation:

Without counting the wife of Uriah and the brothers of Jeconiah, there are fourteen generations and fifteen names from David to the deportation, which are as follows (again, the number on the left denotes the number of generations):

1. Δαυὶδ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Σολομῶνα ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Οὐρίου [David fathered Solomon by Uriah's wife],
2. Σολομὼν δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ῥοβοάμ [Solomon was the father of fathered Rehoboam],
3. Ῥοβοὰμ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἀβιά [Rehoboam fathered Abijah],
4. Ἀβιὰ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἀσάφ [Abijah fathered Asa],
5. Ἀσὰφ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἰωσαφάτ [Asa fathered Jehoshaphat],
6. Ἰωσαφὰτ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἰωράμ [Jehoshaphat fathered Joram],
7. Ἰωρὰμ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ὀζίαν [Joram fathered Uzziah],
8. Ὀζίας δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἰωαθάμ [Uzziah fathered Jotham],
9. Ἰωαθὰμ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἀχάζ [Jotham fathered Ahaz],
10. Ἀχὰζ δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἐζεκίαν [Ahaz fathered Hezekiah],
11. Ἐζεκίας δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Μανασσῆ [Hezekiah fathered Manasseh],
12. Μανασσῆς δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἀμώς [Manasseh fathered Amon],
13. Ἀμὼς δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἰωσίαν [Amon fathered Josiah],
14. Ἰωσίας δὲ *ἐγέννησεν* τὸν Ἰεχονίαν καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς μετοικεσίας Βαβυλῶνος [Josiah fathered Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon].

Generations from the deportation to Christ:

When one includes the generation of Jesus, which is presented in the passive form, there are thirteen generations from the deportation to Christ, and fourteen names (excluding Mary):

1. Μετὰ δὲ τὴν μετοικεσίαν Βαβυλῶνος Ἰεχονίας ***ἐγέννησεν*** τὸν Σαλαθιὴλ [After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah fathered Shealtiel],
2. Σαλαθιὴλ δὲ ***ἐγέννησεν*** τὸν Ζοροβαβέλ [Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel],
3. Ζοροβαβὲλ δὲ ***ἐγέννησεν*** τὸν Ἀβιούδ [Zerubbabel fathered Abihud],
4. Ἀβιοὺδ δὲ ***ἐγέννησεν*** τὸν Ἐλιακίμ [Abihud fathered Eliakim],
5. Ἐλιακὶμ δὲ ***ἐγέννησεν*** τὸν Ἀζώρ [Eliakim fathered Azor],
6. Ἀζὼρ δὲ ***ἐγέννησεν*** τὸν Σαδώκ [Azor fathered Zadok],
7. Σαδὼκ δὲ ***ἐγέννησεν*** τὸν Ἀχίμ [Zadok fathered Achim],
8. Ἀχὶμ δὲ ***ἐγέννησεν*** τὸν Ἐλιούδ [Achim fathered Eliud],
9. Ἐλιοὺδ δὲ ***ἐγέννησεν*** τὸν Ἐλεάζαρ [Eliud fathered Eleazar],
10. Ἐλεάζαρ δὲ ***ἐγέννησεν*** τὸν Ματθάν [Eleazar fathered Matthan],
11. Ματθὰν δὲ ***ἐγέννησεν*** τὸν Ἰακώβ [Matthan fathered Jacob],
12. Ἰακὼβ δὲ ***ἐγέννησεν*** τὸν Ἰωσήφ [Jacob fathered Joseph …]
13. τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας, ἐξ ἧς ***ἐγεννήθη*** Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος χριστός […the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.].

3 The Search for a Missing Generation

Upon reading verse 17 of Matthew 1, readers who feel impelled to go back and count generations, as we just have, encounter a puzzling experience.[4] Should one try to reconcile the list with the account offered by the narrator in verse 17, a missing generation becomes apparent in both the first and last series. The majority of commentators do not address the missing generation in the first group, the absence of a name seems less problematic in this series since a reader can perceive an implicit generation of Abraham. However, the missing generation in the last series has given rise to many exegetical hypotheses; I have categorized these into six groups. The objective of such a classification is not only to offer a much-needed review of research to date but also to understand how critical readers respond to this textual device.

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4 ᾶσαι οὖν αἱ γενεαὶ ἀπὸ Ἀβραὰμ ἕως Δαυὶδ γενεαὶ δεκατέσσαρες καὶ ἀπὸ Δαυὶδ ἕως τῆς μετοικεσίας Βαβυλῶνος γενεαὶ δεκατέσσαρες καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς μετοικεσίας Βαβυλῶνος ἕως τοῦ Χριστοῦ γενεαὶ δεκατέσσαρες. (Matt 1:17) "All the generations from Abraham to David: fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon: fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations."

1. A name was left out from this group by mistake, or there was a voluntary rounding off by the author of the Gospel. This position is shared by Ernst Schmauch and Werner Lohmeyer, Joachim Jeremias, Michael D. Goulder, Herman Hendrickx, W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Craig S. Keener, Simon Légasse, Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer and Robert J. Miller.[5] Some Old Testament genealogical lists also feature a discrepancy between the stated total and the number of elements in the list (1Chr 3:22; Ezra 1:9-11, 2:2-64, 2Ezra 7:7-66). This proposition is impossible to prove and, if accepted, all other interpretative difficulties of biblical texts could potentially simply be dismissed as errors. Luz also believes that there is an approximation of the number of generations.[6] He stresses that in the first century, the context of oral transmission did not allow the listener to count the generations. Since the summary occurs after the list of names, the argument is that the capacity of memory to keep track of the number of generations that had been listed orally is exceeded. This argument is important but not clear-cut. The aural analytical capacities of people living in oral cultures are not the same as those of cultures where the written text predominates. I am not convinced that the listeners or proclaimers would have been unable to detect the error. Furthermore, even if the problem is not apparent during an oral recitation, an undeniable difference still exists between what is presented in the genealogy in verses 2-16 and the information given in verse 17. For Craig Blomberg, Matthew has a more fluid way of counting than we do.[7] He created a stylistic symmetry by organizing two series of thirteen generations around a cycle of fourteen. Matthew counts each group of generations

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5 Ernst Schmauch and Werner Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 3; Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions During the New Testament Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 293–295; Michael D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1974), 23; Herman Hendrickx, *The Infancy Narratives* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984), 23–24; W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, vol. 1: Introduction and Commentary on Matthew I-VII* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 186; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2009), 74; Simon Légasse, "Les généalogies de Jésus," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 99, no. 4 (1998): 446; Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer, "Der Stammbaum des Verheißenen: Theologische Implikationen der Namen und Zahlen in Mt 1.1-17," *New Testament Studies* 46 (2000): 175–92; Robert J. Miller, *Born Divine: The Births of Jesus & Other Sons of God* (Santa Rosa, California: Polebridge, 2003), 79–81.
6 Ulrich Luz, *Matthew* 1-7, 85; see also Moisés Mayordomo-Marín, *Den Anfang Hören: Leserorientierte Evangelienexegese am Beispiel von Matthäus 1-2* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 240.
7 Craig L. Blomberg, "The Liberation of Illegitimacy: Women and Rulers in Matthew 1-2," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 21, no. 4 (1991): 145–50 (146).

as fourteen by alternating between inclusion and exclusion of the names connecting the series to each other. This fluid numerical organization is not founded on any clear examples, however, and Matthew 1 provides no indications to understand the number of generations in this way.

2. Counting some names twice is a popular interpretive strategy of the text. Wilhelm Martin Leberecht De Wette, David Friedrich Strauss, Marie-Joseph Lagrange, Rodney T. Hood, Norman Walker, W. Barnes Tatum, Jacques Masson, D.A. Hagner and Raymond E. Brown count Jeconiah twice: at the end of the second part of the genealogy and at the beginning of the third.[8] This tallies with the interpretation offered by Jerome and the *Opus Imperfectum*.[9] Yet, it seems illogical to include the Jeconiah's birth twice and David's only once. Hagner and Brown respond to this objection by pointing to the confusion around Jeconiah, they believe that the two references imply two separate persons, each with the same name or nickname. Although this proposal is indeed plausible, it is by no means self-evident in Matt 1, since there is nothing in the text to suggest that the second mention of Jeconiah refers to another individual. In a similar manner, Johann Albrecht Bengel, Hugo Schöllig, Ernst Lerle, and Danny Zacharias count David twice, to enumerate fourteen names from Abraham to David; fourteen from David to Josiah, and fourteen from Josiah to Joseph.[10] Yet, in Matthew's text, the second genealogical series ends with Jeconiah, not Josiah. Barclay M. Newman, France Quéré, and Stephen C. Carlson have a similar proposal by extending the name count to Jesus and excluding the second

8 Wilhelm Martin Leberecht De Wette, *Kurzgefasstes Exegetisches Handbuch* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1844), 1.1.S.12; David Friedrich Strauss, *Vie de Jésus ou examen critique de son histoire* (Paris: Ladrange, 1856), 155–156; Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Évangile selon saint Matthieu* (Paris: Gabalda, 1948) 8; Rodney T. Hood, "Genealogies of Jesus," in *Early Christian Origins*, ed. Allen Wikgren (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961) 10; Norman Walker, "Alleged Matthaean Errata," *New Testament Studies* 9 (1963): 391–94. W. Barnes Tatum, "Origin of Jesus Messiah (Matt 1:1, 18a): Matthews's Use of the Infancy Traditions," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96/4 (1977): 523–35 (529); Jacques Masson, *Jésus, fils de David, dans les généalogies de saint Mathieu et de saint Luc* (Paris: Téqui, 1982), 10.27; D.A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 83-4; Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 83–4.

9 Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 61–2; Anonymous, *Incomplete Commentary on Matthew Opus Imperfectum* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic 2010), 21.

10 Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1858), 94–5; Hugo Schöllig, "Die Zëhlung der Generationem im matthäischen Stammbaum," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 59 (1968): 261–68; Ernst Lerle, "Die Ahnenverzeichnisse Jesu: Versuch einer Christologischen Interpretation," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 72 (1981): 112–17; Danny Zacharias, *Matthew's Presentation of the Son of David* (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2017), 42–4.

mention of Jeconiah.[11] They see fourteen names from Abraham to David; fourteen from David (counted a second time) to Josiah, and fourteen from Jeconiah to Jesus. However, counting David twice and Jeconiah only once is inconsistent here.

3. André Paul and Robert H. Gundry suggest counting Mary as the biological parent of Jesus, in addition to Joseph as the legal relative of Jesus.[12] However, this solution only works if we are interested in the sum total of names, rather than the number of generations. By including Mary, the number of generations does not increase since the generations of Joseph and of Jesus are already counted. Moreover, counting Mary while ignoring the other women of the genealogy seems to be rather inconsistent.[13]

4. Krister Stendahl and H. Benedict Green count Jesus and Christ as two different generations.[14] However, Matthew's gospel appears to indicate that Jesus is the Christ from the moment of his conception (Matt 1:18,20) rather than solely after the resurrection. Similarly, inspired by the divisions of history according to 2Apoc. Bar. 53-74, Herman C. Waetjen counts Jesus, who would die on the cross, as the thirteenth generation, and the risen Christ inaugurating eschatological times as the fourteenth generation.[15] However, my objection here would be that the other generations are expressed through the action of begetting, which is of a very different nature to resurrection.

5. Jane Schaberg and Rudolf Pesch regard the missing generation as a clue to search for Jesus' father.[16] According to Schaberg, Jesus was conceived in an illegitimate union with an unknown biological father, whose name is missing

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11 Barclay M. Newman, "Matthew 1.1–18: Some Comments and a Suggested Restructuring," *Bible Translator* 27 (1976): 209–12; France Quéré, *Jésus enfant* (Paris: Desclée, 1992), 83; Stephen C. Carlson, "The Davidic Key for Counting the Generations in Matthew 1:17," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (2014): 665–83.

12 André Paul, *L'évangile de l'enfance selon saint-Mathieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 28. 35; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 1982), 19.

13 Raymond E. Brown, *Birth*, 83.

14 Krister Stendahl, "Matthew" in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, eds. M. Black, H. Rowley and A. S. Peake (London: Nelson, 1962): 770–71; H. Benedict Green, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 54.

15 Herman C. Waetjen, "Genealogy as the Key to the Gospel According to Matthew," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95/2 (1976): 205–230.

16 Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 36-41. Rudolf Pesch, "'He will be called a Nazorean': Messianic Exegesis in Matthew 1-2," in *Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel*, eds. Craig A. Evans and William Richard Stegner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994): 129–78 (146).

from the genealogy. Pesch goes in the opposite direction by looking toward God's paternity. Schaberg's anonymous father only replace Joseph in the list without adding another generation. Even if Pesch's interpretation is theologically meaningful by pointing to an important theme in the gospels, his proposition still does not change the number of generations.

6. According to John Chrysostom and Hilary of Poitiers, the population deported to Babylon must be included as a generation, thereby furnishing the account with another generation.[17] However, this hypothesis rests upon a highly original, even unlikely, way of understanding the verb γενεά used repeatedly in Matt 1 to link a father and his son. Another proposition, presented by Hilary of Poitiers and echoed by Brian M. Nolan and Gérard Claudel, is to count the Holy Spirit.[18] As previously pointed out, replacing Joseph does not add a generation. Moreover, the Holy Spirit is not otherwise mentioned in Matthew's genealogy.

4 Why Three Series of 14?

Another group of interpretations that also strive to reconcile the number of generations with the account offered by the narrator in verse 17 focuses on the significance of the grouping of the generations into three series of fourteen. The common interpretive strategy here is to seek the reason of the use of this numerical scheme in order to understand the synthesis of verse 17. Various scholars fill in the gap by proposing reasoning underlying the numerical patterns. I have grouped the following various understandings according to the numbers they strive to explain: 3, 7, 14, 40, and 42.

4.1 Three Series

John Chrysostom explains that the three series of verse 17 come from the three forms of governance in the Old Testament: aristocratic (judges), monarchical

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17 John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, Homily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 31; Hilary of Poitiers, *On Matthew* 1.1.2-3 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 43–44.

18 Brian M. Nolan, *The Royal Son of God: The Christology of Matthew 1-2 in the Setting of the Gospel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 223; Gérard Claudel, "Joseph, figure du lecteur modèle de Matthieu," in *The Gospel of Matthew at the Crossroads of Early Christianity*, ed. David Senior (Leuven: Peeters, 2011): 349–374 (356).

(kings), and oligarchic (priests).[19] He felt that the structure of the genealogy emphasized the constancy of sin in the history of Israel. The three groups correspond broadly to the different groups of generations in Matt 1:17 (Abraham to David, David to the exile and from the exile to Jesus). However, to summarize Israel's history as sin, as such an interpretation entails, is rooted in the anti-Judaism of the Church Fathers and is obviously problematic and reductive.

A.H. McNeile, Stanley D. Toussaint, Craig S. Keener and George T. Montague argue that the three-part structure of the genealogy's use of numbers is a mnemonic device for oral recitation.[20] Yet surely the discrepancy between the number of generations listed in verses 2-16 and the total given in verse 17 can only hinder memorization. Moreover, even if verse 17 is indeed a mnemonic device, this does not explain the difference in the number of generations.

4.2 Seven: An Important Biblical Symbol

Edgar Krentz, Herman Hendrickx, Marshall D. Johnson, N.T. Wright, Savvas Agouridēs, and Armand Abecassis view the number fourteen as representing two times seven.[21] The number seven has important symbolism in the Bible. The creation described in Genesis 1 taking place over seven days is just one example. Similarly, re-creation by the Messiah would be counted in six groups of seven. This does not seem convincing since Matt 1 does not mention the number seven, only groups of fourteen.

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19 John Chrysostom, *Homilies*, 31.

20 A.H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 5; Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold The King: A Study of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980), 41; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 74; George T. Montague, *Companion God: A Cross Cultural Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 20, 41.

21 Edgar Krentz, "Extent of Matthew's Prologue: Toward the Structure of the First Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83, no. 4 (1964): 413; Herman Hendrickx, *The Infancy Narratives*, 23–4; Marshall D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 202; N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*. vol. 1, *Of Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis/London: Fortress, 1992), 385–86; Savvas Agouridēs, "The Birth of Jesus and the Herodian Dynasty: An Understanding of Matthew, Chapter 2," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 37, no. 1–4 (1992): 146; Armand Abecassis "'*En vérité je vous le dis' une lecture juive des évangiles*" (Paris: Éditions n° 1, 1999), 95–6.

4.3 Fourteen and its Many Interpretations

David Friedrich Strauss proposes that the number fourteen was initially fortuitous, but that, once Matthew noticed it he applied it to the rest of the genealogy in order to match the regular rhythm of the genealogies in Genesis.[22] Denis Buzy and Jacques Masson believe that the author of Matthew took the number fourteen from the genealogy of 1 Chronicles 2:1-15, and modeled his own genealogy on this pattern.[23]

Charles H. Talbert points out that there are fourteen generations from Abraham to David in 1 Chronicles 1-2; fourteen periods between Adam and the Messiah in 2Apoc. Bar. 53-74, and fourteen links between Moses and the last teachers in mAv 1.1-12.[24] According to Talbert, the significance of this pattern around the number fourteen is simply to indicate that something extraordinary is being told.

According to W.D. Davies, the number fourteen stems from tradition. It is found in 1 Chronicles 1-2, Exod. Rab. 12.2, and a source taken up by Luke 3. The author of Matt associated this tradition with the number three used a few times in his Gospel (Matt 1:18-25; 2:1-12; 2:13-15).[25] Nevertheless, it is insufficient to show that the number three is used in various places as this does not account for its meaning.

Through a literary analysis of rabbinic texts (M. Abot. and ARN), Israel Finkelstein relates the figures in the genealogy to the number of high priests: fourteen before the Temple of Solomon, and fourteen from the construction of the Temple to Jaddua, the last high priest mentioned in Scripture.[26] However, Finkelstein proposes two groups of fourteen, whereas Matthew's gospel has three. Also, the number of high priests can vary between rabbinical sources and Flavius Josephus. Only partial lists remain and there is no consensus on the best way of counting these priests. Moreover, the genealogy in Matthew proposes a messiah, son of David, close to the royal traditions and not the sacerdotal traditions as described in Luke.

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22 David Friedrich Strauss, *Vie de Jésus*, 163.

23 Denis Buzy, *Évangile selon saint Matthieu* (Paris: Pirot-Clamer, 1946), 3; Jacques Masson, *Jésus,* 131–33.

24 Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 33.

25 W.D. Davies, "The Jewish Sources of Matthew's Messianism," In *Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 500.

26 Israel Finkelstein, *Mabo le Massekot Abot ve Abot d'Rabbi Nathan* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950). Quoted by W.D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, Brown Judaic Studies 186 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 303–04.

According to Herman C. Waetjen, the number fourteen bears a messianic meaning and summarizes the history of Israel.[27] In the messianic apocalypse of 2Apoc. Bar. 53-74, the history of the world is divided into fourteen eras. These periods are symbolized by thirteen alternations of black and white water, followed by the Messianic age, symbolized by lightning. However, the narrator of 2Apoc. Bar. does not emphasize the number of eras; they are only implicit. Moreover, Matthew 1 does not describe fourteen eras, but rather three series of fourteen generations.

According to George F. Moore, the three series of fourteen generations are equivalent to the seventy weeks mentioned in Daniel 9:24-27.[28] This prophecy decrees a period of seventy weeks of years for the people to cease sinning. 70 weeks (of seven days) of years equates to 490 years ($70 \times 7 = 490$). If each generation lasts 35 years, 14 generations of 35 years amounts to 490 years, which corresponds to the 490 years of Daniel. Thus, the coming of Jesus as Messiah becomes the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. The problem with this hypothesis is that the time span of a generation, 35 years, is arbitrary. Without going into the complex mathematics of Moore, John P. Meier points to the same text in the book of Daniel to state that fourteen comes from the apocalyptic perspective:[29] Matthew is said to use apocalyptic language to show that God arranges history to advance toward its fulfillment with the Messiah. Yet Daniel's text uses septenaries, rather than groupings of fourteen. The use of fourteen in particular has no obvious meaning, therefore, even though it may indeed confer an apocalyptic connotation upon the text. For Nicholas G. Piotrowski, the counting of generations is in itself an apocalyptic tradition.[30]

Chaim Kaplan seeks a solution to the conundrum in the 28-day lunar cycle. Akin the moon's fourteen days waxing and fourteen days waning, the genealogy can be seen as the alternation between the growth and decline of Israel.[31] David is situated at the juncture between growth and the onset of decline; the next apex is the arrival of Christ. While the relationship between genealogy and the lunar cycle

27 Herman C. Waetjen, "Genealogy," 205–30 (207–12).

28 George F. Moore, "Fourteen Generations: 490 Years: An Explanation of the Genealogy of Jesus," *Harvard Theological Review* 14, no. 1 (1921): 97–103.

29 John P. Meier, *Matthew* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990), 53.

30 Nicholas G. Piotrowski, "'After the Deportation': Observations in Matthew's Apocalyptic Genealogy," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 25, no. 2 (2015): 189–203.

31 Chaim Kaplan, "Some New Testament Problems in the Light of Rabbinics and the Pseudepigrapha: The Generation Schemes in Matthew 1:1-17, Luke 3:24ff.," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 87 (1930): 465–71.

allows for an interesting theological commentary, the correlation here is not explicit.

George Box, Floyd V. Filson, Joachim Jeremias, W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Bastiaan van Elderen, Leon Morris, John Mark Jones, Simon Légasse, Michel Quesnel, John Nolland, R.T. France, John P. Meier, Craig A. Evans and Danny Zacharias hold that the genealogical numbers are due to a gematric calculation.[32] The numerical value of the three consonants of the name "David" is 14, whereby 14 = 4 + 6 + 4 = ד + ו + ד. The three periods of fourteen would then derive from the name David, consisting as it does of three consonants with a total value of fourteen. This is a popular theory because it explains the use of numbers and also stresses the importance of David in Matthew. Indeed, Matthew gives more attention to David than the other canonical gospels. Even though this approach is compelling, it is also problematic. The technique would only be effective for readers who know Greek and Hebrew, given that it is a Greek text that is to follow a gematrical process based on a Hebrew name. Even though most scholars present Matthew's gospel's original audience as Jewish and therefore able to understand both languages, these readers also would have to recognize that there is a gematria, and nothing in the text clearly indicates this. Finally, as Catherine Vialle writes: "This type of speculation could be subsequent to the writing of Matthew's gospel."[33]

The anonymous *Opus Imperfectum* attempts a spiritual interpretation of the numbers in Greek.[34] It states that fourteen is constructed from the letter iota, the first letter of Jesus' name, which in Greek, represents the number ten. According to

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32 George Box, "The Gospel Narratives of the Nativity and the Alleged Influence of Heathen Ideas," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 6 (1905): 80–101; Floyd V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 53; Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 292; W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Saint Matthew,* 163–65; Bastiaan van Elderen, "The Significance of the Structure of Matthew 1," in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos*, eds. Jerry Vardaman and Edwin M. Yamauchi (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989): 7–8; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 23; John Mark Jones, "Subverting the Textuality of Davidic Messianism: Matthew's Presentation of the Genealogy and the Davidic Title," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56 (1994): 256–72; Simon Légasse "Les généalogies de Jésus," 446-47; Michel Quesnel, *Jésus-Christ selon saint Matthieu: synthèse théologique* (Paris: Desclée, 1998), 25; John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church, and Morality in the First Gospel* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 53; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 86–87; R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 87; Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 37; Danny Zacharias, *Matthew's Presentation*, 47–51.

33 Catherine Vialle, "Afin que fut accompli … avec quelques surprises et déplacements. Le récit de Matthieu 1-2," *Mélange de science religieuse* 73 (2016): 3–18 (5) (translation mine).

34 Anonymous, *Incomplete Commentary on Matthew Opus Imperfectum* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic 2010), 23.

Opus Imperfectum, four and ten represent four times "the Christ" since there were three prefigurations of the Christ before the coming of the real one. Although these concepts could account for how or why Matthew arrives at the number fourteen, they do not explain the difference between the number of generations in the genealogy and in verse 17.

4.4 Forty Years in the Desert

Józef T. Milik pursues an idea proposed by Augustine and Aquinas, using the forty generations before Jesus in the genealogy instead of the forty-two generations of verse 17.[35] This number relates to the forty years that Israel spent in the desert. Jesus then plays the role of Joshua, his namesake, who led the way into the promised land. Although such an argument is an interesting theological interpretation, it does not address the difference between the number of generations listed in verses 2-16 and the total according to verse 17.

4.5 Forty-Two Generations

The *Opus Imperfectum* also offers an interpretation of the forty-two generations that represent six weeks.[36] Since the number six recalls the number of days in the creation narrative (Gen 1), it symbolizes labor and suffering. A symbol also deemed as apt for the birth of Christ. This patristic interpretation is unconvincing to modern critics, however.

M.J. Moreton suggests that the number 42 (three lots of fourteen generations) can be understood by reading Rev 13:5, which mentions forty-two months of evil before God's intervention.[37] Yet Matthew's reliance on the book of Revelation is by no means self-evident. Like Moreton, Jason Hood sees the key to the enigma in the total number of generations according to verse 17 (three times fourteen; Matt 1:17).[38] He alludes to various traditions around this number, such as the forty-two

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35 Józef T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 257. Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels* 2.4.9.

36 Anonymous, *Incomplete Commentary on Matthew Opus Imperfectum* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press Academic 2010), 21–3.

37 M.J. Moreton, "The Genealogy of Jesus," in *Studia Evangelica*, *vol. II,* ed. F.L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964): 219–24.

38 Jason B. Hood, "Metaphorty-Two? The Wilderness and the People of God in Matthew 1:1-17," in *Searching the Scriptures*, eds. Craig A. Evans and Jeremiah J. Johnston (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2015): 29–45.

kings who reigned in Judah and Israel (not counting Queen Athaliah) or the forty-two Odes of Solomon, which indicates that this number is associated with royalty. Hood relies mainly on Origen's comparison of the forty-two stages of Israel in the desert in Numbers 33 and the forty-two stages in the genealogy of Jesus.[39] He also points to Dan 7:25 and 12:7, where there is mention of "a period, two periods and a half-period," if one we were to attribute one year to each period, this amounts to three and a half years and therefore forty-two months. Hood argues that, in Jewish and Christian traditions, forty-two is a metaphor that evokes a memory of the time of transition and testing that the Israelites experienced in the desert. In fact, the translation of the LXX from the book of Joshua transformed the number of years in the desert from forty to forty-two. Hood's metaphorical approach to Matthew's numbers renders his perspective interesting. However, as with the majority of the previous explanations, this explanation does not account for the difference between the number of generations listed in Matt 1:2-16 and the total given in verse 17. Also, forty-two is used considerably less frequently than forty to refer to the Israelites' time in the desert.

For Joseph Michael Heer, the numbers used by Matthew can be understood in light of Talmudic speculation regarding the three sacrifices of Balak and Balaam in Numbers 23.[40] According to *b. Sanh.* 105b and *b. Hor.*, Balaam thrice ordered Balak to build seven altars to sacrifice seven bulls and seven goats, a total of 42 sacrifices. An explicit connection between these forty-two sacrifices and the forty-two generations in Matthew is unclear, however. Furthermore, as already shown, the total number of the generations in verses 2-16 is not actually forty-two. Finally, using Talmudic literature to explain a prior text is arguably not a sound strategy.

Roy A. Rosenberg and Leroy A. Huizenga propose investigating the links between Jesus and Isaac.[41] Abraham's offering up of Isaac would have taken place during the 42nd jubilee since the creation of the world (Jub. 13.16, 1.15, 19.1). This association is based on similarities between Matt 1:20-21 and Gen 17:19 (LXX): in Matthew 1, the forty-two generations following Abraham were presented in order to draw a parallel between the sacrifice of Isaac and that of Jesus. However, this hypothesis places too much emphasis on Isaac, who is mentioned only once in the genealogy. Also, Matthew 1 does not particularly lend itself to a sacrificial interpretation of Jesus. Furthermore, it only addresses the forty-two

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39 Origen, *Homily on Numbers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2009), 168. .

40 Joseph Michael Heer, *Die Stammbäume Jesu nach Matthäus und Lukas: ihre ursprüngliche Bedeutung und Textgestalt und ihre Quellen: eine exegetisch-kritische Studie*, Biblische Studien 15 (Freiburg: Herdersche Verlagshandlung, 1910), 121–22.

41 Roy A. Rosenberg, "Jesus, Isaac, and the Suffering Servant," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84, no. 4 (1965): 387; Leroy A. Huizenga, *The New Isaac* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 143–44.

generations in verse 17 of Matthew 1, not the total number of generations listed in verses 2-16.

For Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, as well as for Edmondo F. Lupieri, Jesus is placed in the 42nd generation to mark the beginning of the era of the last kingdom, in accordance with a prophecy from the book of Daniel (2:44; 7:13-14).[42] According to Destro, Pesce and Lupieri, there is an implicit reference in Matthew to a period of forty-nine generations leading up to the jubilee, cited in Lev 25:8-10, that is to occur in the last year after a period of seven weeks of years ($7 \times 7 = 49$). The number forty-two indicates that there is a jubilee, and is derived from forty-nine minus one week ($49 - 7 = 42$), whereby the last week represents the time remaining before the end of the world. Nonetheless, there is no explicit mention of a jubilee calculation in Matthew 1; nor are forty-two generations listed in verses 2-16 (Matt 1:2-16).

Bernard Gosse points to the use of forty-two as a symbol denoting curse and blessing: forty-two years of curse of Ahaziah in 2Chr 22:2; forty-two sacrifices of Balaam in Numbers 22 in a quest to curse a people that become blessing; the forty-two psalms of the Elohistic psalter and also in the Book of the Dead, that talks of a judgment that could end with a malediction or a benediction from 42 secondary gods judging the dead and a declaration of innocence in 42 points.[43] For Gosse, the forty-two generations set Jesus up as a blessing despite all possible maledictions. However, this interpretation seems to imply a supersessionist, anti-Jewish view in which Israel's traditions are evoked as solely negative, only subsequently trans-formed with Jesus' birth.

This second list of creative interpretations shows, once again, responses from scholars searching for a way to make sense of the number of generations in Matt 1. Scholars have tried to resolve the issue by numerous methods, which have varying degrees of plausibility. They demonstrate that exegetical response to the text is to look toward biblical, apocryphal or rabbinic texts to find intertextual connections. This albeit long but thorough list is important to establish that the inconsistency of the number of generations in Matthew 1 has generated many unconvincing explanations.

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42 Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, "The Cultural Structure of the Infancy Narrative in the Gospel of Matthew," In *Infancy Gospels*, ed. Claire Clivaz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011): 94–115; Edmondo F. Lupieri, "Dodici, sette, undici, ventiquattro: numeri, chiese e fine del mondo," *Annali di Storia dell' Esegesi* 22, no. 2 (2005): 357–71.
43 Bernard Gosse, "The 42 Generations of the Genealogy of Jesus in Matt 1:1-17, and the Symbolism of Number 42, Curse or Blessing, in the Bible and in Egypt," *Studia Biblica Slovaca* 10, no. 2 (2018): 142–51.

Unlike all the options presented so far, Georg Strecker and Moisés Mayordomo-Marín claim that it is possible this numerical structure has no particular significance.[44] Yet, if the structure has no significance, why would Matthew explicitly refer to it in verse 17? Indeed, reception history of the genealogy shows quite the opposite to be the case: rather than an absence of meaning, there seem to be an overabundance of possible meanings. In this case, academic erudition has not resulted in critical consensus.

I propose approaching this problem from a different viewpoint, through the interaction between the text and its readers. The objective here is not to solve the problem of the number of generations, but to describe this literary device by its effect on the reading experience it generates.

5 The Experience of a Self-Consuming Artifact

Literary theorist Stanley Fish has been an important influence in the rise and development of reader-response theory. Jane P. Tompkins describes Fish's view on interpretation as follows:

> Meaning, according to Fish, is not something one extracts from a poem, like a nut from its shell, but an experience one has in the course of reading. Literature, as a consequence, is not regarded as a fixed object of attention but as a sequence of events that unfold within the reader's mind. Correspondingly, the goal of literary criticism becomes the faithful description of the activity of reading, an activity that is minute, complicated, strenuous, and never the same from one reading to the next […][45]

Fish is renowned for his emphasis on the role of interpretative communities in the production and the validation of interpretations:

> Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around.[46]

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44 Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit: Untersuchung zur Theologie des Matthäus* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 38; Moisés Mayordomo-Marín, *Den Anfang Hören: Leserorientierte Evangelienexegese am Beispiel von Matthäus 1-2* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 242.

45 Jane P. Tompkins, *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), xvi–xvii.

46 Stanley E. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 171.

This literary theory has important implications in hermeneutics. On the one hand, interpretation is not a quest for a single objective meaning of a text; there are several possible interpretations that depend on the communities to which an interpreter belongs. On the other hand, interpretation is not open to an infinite number of possibilities without anything to keep a reader in check. Several critics, such as philosopher Martha Nussbaum, qualify Fish's literary theory as extreme relativism and even radical subjectivism.[47] In biblical studies, Fish has been dismissed unfairly as an interpretive relativist, in part due to the positivistic approaches that have dominated exegetical academia. Fish, however, never implies that interpretations are limitless and unbound. On the contrary, he affirms that the reader's responses are not autonomous, since they are determined and possibly sanctioned, whether positively or negatively, by the interpretative communities to which he or she belongs. Fish's approach invites a plurality of meanings that can be debated within interpretative communities.

Fish does not equate meaning as the understanding reached at the end of a reading since "everything a reader does, even if he later undoes it, is a part of the 'meaning experience' and should not be discarded."[48] This comes into play with a textual device he calls self-consuming artifacts: "The reader's self (or at least his interior self) is consumed as he responds to the medicinal purging of the dialectician's art."[49] The text "consumes itself" when it guides readers to an understanding and then alters course by abandoning this perspective. At the same time, readers are also "consumed." They are destabilized to allow for a transformation of their convictions. Fish emphasizes the readers' turmoil; they experience a cognitive and affective effect. He not only describes the change in the readers' understanding of a text, but also emphasizes the transformation of the readers themselves. Fish proposes some examples of works that involve readers in discursive actions and then invalidate deductions those activities yield: Plato's *Phadreus*; Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, and seventeen-century literature from Bunyan, Bacon, Burton, and Milton. The outcome is a disturbing and unsettling experience over the course of which readers must continually revise their understanding. These works are self-consuming in two senses: they unbind their own structures as well as the reader's self-understanding.

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47 Martha Nussbaum, "Sophistry about Conventions," *New Literary History* 17, no. 1 (1985): 129–39.

48 Stanley E. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 4.

49 Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 3.

In a later publication, Fish proposes a way to address the problems generated by such devices:

> In short, these are problems that apparently cannot be solved, at least not by the methods traditionally brought to bear on them. What I would like to argue is that they are not meant to be solved, but to be experienced (they signify), and that consequently any procedure that attempts to determine which of a number of readings is correct will necessarily fail.[50]

This is precisely what we are dealing with in the problem of the number of generations in Matthew 1. The exegetical debate on this subject does not attest to an ambiguity that must be solved. Instead, this controversy shows that readers have always read this passage as a significant experience of ambiguity. Traditional approaches to this ambiguity have tried to explain it away but in so doing, ironically, make Fish's point. Instead of trying to resolve the enigma of the number of generations in Matt 1, I propose to identify how readers could react to this problem by presenting my own reading experience. Instead of solving a problem, or trying to, Fish invites us to describe a unique experience.

Moreover, a self-consuming artifact directs the readers' attention elsewhere than itself: "[a self-consuming artifact] transfers pressure and attention from the work to its effects, from what happens on the page to what is happening in the reader. A self-consuming artifact signifies most successfully when it fails, when it points *away* from itself to something its forms cannot capture."[51] The problem regarding the number of generations is not an error, and the quest for a solution to this problem is not a failure. Self-consuming artifacts are sometimes the opposite of what they appear to be. At first glance, their goal seems to be the transmission of truth in a linear and logical way. However, upon reflection, the text contradicts itself and subverts what it has already proposed. Verse 17 of Matthew 1 disrupts and undermines the very structure it is putting in place. Yet, from a reader-oriented perspective, the true subject of Matthew 1 is not the genealogical origin of Jesus, but the readers themselves. They are the ones who are establishing the origins of their own faith in Christ through this overwhelming reading experience. In encountering a problem such as this, the key is to experience it and see how we, the readers, are transformed by a mystifying passage.

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50 Stanley E. Fish, "Interpreting Variorum," In *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981): 164–84.

51 Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, 3–4 (emphasis in the original).

6 Self-Consuming Artifacts in Biblical Studies

French postmodern theories have interrogated rationalist traditions using questions derived from a different epistemology.[52] Biblical studies were founded with an Enlightenment epistemology that still has a great influence on the current state of our academia, with the aim of producing stable textual interpretations. Antifoundational literary concepts such as self-consuming artifacts have not found much traction in biblical studies owing to a very different way of understanding textual interpretation. I have, nevertheless, found three very different examples of the application of self-consuming artifacts in biblical studies.

Michael Brennan Dick utilizes the concept to explain how by submitting his oracles to writing a prophet acquired a new awareness of himself as *poietes* ["craftsman"], whose work/poetry emerged from his atelier with the claim that it was still Yahweh's word.[53] The prophet thus becomes vulnerable to his own strictures against a human crafting a divine image and "consumes" himself.

Hugh C. White presents the Joseph story in Genesis as a narrative that "consumes" its content.[54] He uses Fish's concept to show that the semantic world of the direct discourse of the characters ultimately consumes or subordinates the referential system of meaning developed in the indirect discourse of the narrative framework, preventing the story from attaining closure.

In his introduction to Reader-response criticism, Robert Fowler identifies three examples of self-consuming artifacts in Mark's Gospel: the rich man (Mark 10:17-22), Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42) and the disciples' confusion about parables (Mark 4:10-13).[55] Although the first two examples are not developed by Fowler, he analyzes how Mark 4:10-13 can be seen as a self-consuming artifact. He points out how the reading experience of this passage involves a powerful dramatic irony that hinges on a gap and a double reversal. The gap is identified in the statement in Mark 4:11 that the disciples have been given the secret of the kingdom, but that secret was never narrated. The double reversal happens in Mark 4:13, Jesus rebukes the disciples: "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?" The roles are now reversed: the insiders

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52 Stanley Fish, "French Theory in America," *New York Times* blog, accessed July 29, 2020, https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com//2008/04/06/french-theory-in-america/.

53 Michael Brennan Dick, "Prophetic Poiēsis and the Verbal Icon," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (1984): 226–46 (227).

54 Hugh C. White, "The Joseph Story: A Narrative Which 'Consumes' Its Content," *Semeia,* 31 (1985): 49–69.

55 Robert M. Fowler, "Reader-Response Criticism: Figuring out Mark's Reader," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, eds. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992): 50–83, esp. 70–3.

are now outsiders and the outsiders are now insiders. As Fowler puts it: "This double reversal in 4:13 encourages us to look back over the preceding verses to reconsider and reevaluate what we have just read."[56] In light of this surprise and retrospective, Fowler points out how this reading experience leads one to an ironic comprehension of Mark 4:11 and how the text "consumes itself." While his analysis may correctly show the stages in which readers transform their understanding of the text, it fails to show how this reading experience can "consume" and transform its readers.

7 The Effects of Matthew 1 as a Self-Consuming Artifact

Regarding the number of generations, the genealogy sets forth a verifiable proposition that is then immediately undermined by the ensuing summary. The experience of incoherence in the generation count in Matt 1 has the effect of engaging readers to think and respond more actively. In what follows, I describe the effects of this textual ambiguity in my own experience to illustrate theological, ideological or metanarrative changes when I, as a reader, am being "consumed."

7.1 Understanding the Nature of this Text

What are the effects of this singular textual phenomenon? I propose to see verse 17 as a subtle nod between two interlocutors, a sign that invites readers onto a path toward deeper understanding. Engaging with the problem of the number of generations helps readers to better understand the nature of what they are reading. Matthew 1 is not a historical or biological genealogy, but an interpretation of the history of Israel. A comparison with Jesus' genealogy in Luke 3 confirms that these two texts are literary and theological constructs that are not to be understood as historically accurate. Matthew 1 is a text that refers to deeper realities than a simple chronology of facts. It can be seen as "mythical" in the sense that it does not relate to objective knowledge, but, more fundamentally, is concerned with something that is inexpressible. In other words, as a myth it tries to convey the relation of human beings to the fundamental questions of existence. It seeks to unravel the

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56 Robert M. Fowler, "Reader-Response Criticism," 50–83 (72).

mystery of the origins of the world and its future. It is precisely the unutterable that myth tries to bring into language.[57]

7.2 An Invitation to Question Legitimating Discourse

Exegesis from a reader's perspective is related to postmodern considerations. Matthew attests to the great tradition of Israel, but at the same time calls it into question. This can be read in terms of a postmodern critique of meta-narratives. Meta-narratives are legitimating discourses, they are stories about reality to justify past and present development. Postmodern criticism challenges the universal criteria of judgment. Great stories are broken down into heterogeneous language elements that can no longer serve the legitimation of an ideology or an institution.[58]

I consider Matt 1:1-17 a meta-narrative because it encompasses the history of Israel over several centuries, and interprets it in such a way that the culmination is Jesus, the Messiah. It is an evocation of many narratives. Through naming the characters involved, by metonymy, the genealogy evokes all the stories told about them. In a pre-modern context, this meta-narrative could be understood as a faithful representation of reality. Postmodern criticism, on the other hand, emphasizes that, as with all narration, it is not a direct description of history, but rather a representation of it from certain perspective. Matt 1:1-17 is a literary construction that has several effects on its readers. The genealogy has a legitimating function for Jesus, announced in the first verse as "Christ, son of Abraham, son of David." It offers readers a systematic look at Israel's history, reinterpreted to emphasize the origins of Jesus as Christ. In short, the text tries to convince its readers to accept its perspective. However, the genealogy also intrinsically bears a critique of this meta-narrative, by virtue of the way it subverts the readers' expectations. Through its gaps, and specifically through the problem of the discrepancy in the number of generations, the genealogy opens up an interpretative space to its readers. To use Eco's terminology, this is an instance of an "open text."[59] It invites readers to actively contribute to the interpretation.

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57 See Thomas R. Hatina, "From History to Myth and Back Again: The Historicizing Function of Scripture in Matthew 2," in *Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels, vol. 2: The Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Thomas R. Hatina (London: T&T Clark, 2008): 98–118.

58 Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris : Éditions de Minuit, 1979).

59 Umberto Eco, *Lector in Fabula: La coopération interprétative dans les textes narratifs* (Paris: Grasset, 1985), 72.

Matthew's readers can go against the grain. They can choose to either accept or reject the worldview offered by the text. In either case, this open text invites readers to become involved, to think and to make a decision that could potentially change their perspective. This text was composed to transform its readers. It invites them to construct another representation of the world. In the first century, this reading may have contested the worldview that resulted from Roman imperial ideology: in Matthew 1, it is not the Emperor who is at the center of everything, but Jesus as God's Christ. In a 21st-century setting, this reading can challenge a vision of the world in which God has no place. In a way, this genealogy "organizes" the history of Israel so that it leads to Jesus as Christ, but it also leaves readers free to see the threads of this interpretive tapestry, showing the "assembled" aspect of this vision. Thus, interpreters can pull on the threads to disassemble it and see that it is neither perfect nor totalitarian. By carrying out a 'deconstruction' of the rhetoric put into place in the text, readers are obliged to question the meaning of this narrative. As a reader, I read this text as a call to reconfigure my understanding of the origins of Jesus, although my predominant experience was my way of seeing the world being transformed. It is a self-consuming artifact, an experience of incongruity in which the text and the reader are transformed through a process of negation. This experience of unreliability is neither an imperfection nor a problem to be solved, but a means of showing the insufficiency of words to describe the relationship between Christ and the history of Israel. Rather than asserting that Matthew's narrator is unreliable, I propose that the text itself offers a perplexing experience that transforms its readers. As a self-consuming artifact, the narrative in Matt 1:17 consumes itself to allow readers to question themselves.

8 Grasping Matthew's Reversals

Matthew's first chapter fosters many interesting reversals. The presence of women in this genealogy is a well-documented example. Most biblical genealogies do not mention women. Matthew includes women who are part of intriguing narratives. The reason for their inclusion is another classical Matthean enigma. Without entering into that debate, it is clear from the exegetical response that the presence of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the wife of Uriah rearrange expectations. The emphasis on David's adultery and murder (Matt 1:6 parallel text 2Sam 11) as well as Judah's injustice (Matt 1:3 parallel text Gen 38) subverts the hegemonic masculinity associated with these characters in biblical narratives.[60] The presence of foreigners

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60 Sébastien Doane, "Masculinities of the Husbands in the Genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:2–16)," *Biblical Interpretation* 27, no. 1 (2019): 91–106.

such as Ruth (verse 5), negative characters such as Achaz (verse 9 parallel text 2 Kgs. 16:1-20) and Manasseh (verse 10 parallel text 2 Kgs 21:1-18) and unknown characters subverts the expectation that this genealogy's purpose is to legitimize the heir of this royal lineage. As Matthew 1 gives an important place to that which is outside of the norm, Christopher C. Fuller describes this list as a parody or a satire of Old Testament genealogies.[61]

The absence of a direct genealogical link between Joseph and Jesus is also an interesting reversal. Matt 1:2-16 implements a complex genealogy to justify the attribution of the title of "Christ" and "son of David" to Jesus in verse 1. Yet, after a succession of generations from Abraham to Joseph, the narrator subverts the expectation that he, himself, suggested by suddenly putting an end to it. Following the pattern of the previous 15 verses, it is natural to anticipate that the genealogy will conclude with "Joseph begot [ἐγέννησεν] Jesus." However, at the crucial moment, after thirty-nine instances where a man begets another man, Joseph does not beget Jesus. The verb is in a passive form and it is not a man that begets, but a woman: "…Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom (ἐγεννήθη) Jesus was born … " (Matt 1:16).

Matthew's use of Davidic traditions is an example of an under-evaluated reversal that could benefit from being viewed as a self-consuming artifact. Matthew's first words present Jesus as Christ, son of David, son of Abraham (Matt 1:1). Scholarly research has put forth the many ways in which Davidic traditions are utilized in Matthew.[62] However, it has not sufficiently examined the way Matthew critics David and modifies expectations regarding a Davidic messiah. David Clines illustrates the favorable bias of modern exegesis toward David, even when the biblical text presents him with positive and negative traits.[63] Clines notes that because commentators see David as an ideal man, ideal king and as prefiguration of the Messiah, they minimize the negative aspects of David's character. This bias prevents Matthean scholars that discuss David's importance in this gospel from seeing the double movement in Matt 1, which begins by legitimizing Jesus, presented in the first verse as "son of David" and goes on to distance him from the king

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61 Christopher C. Fuller, "Matthew's Genealogy as Eschatological Satire: Bakhtin Meets Form Criticism," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007): 119–32.

62 For example, Danny Zacharias, *Matthew's Presentation* or Nathan C. Johnson, "The Passion according to David: Matthew's Arrest Narrative, The Absalom Revolt, and Militant Messianism" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (2018): 247–72.

63 David Clines, "David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible," in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. David Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1995): 212–41, esp. 229–241.

of Jerusalem by recalling an important crime that he committed. Matthew's genealogy directs readers to David's faults: "David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah" (Matt 1:6). The genealogical pattern x begets y, is therefore modified to include a commentary that presents Solomon's mother as "the wife of Uriah," even though Bathsheba was David's lawful wife at the time Salomon was conceived in the book of Samuel's narrative. In Matt 1:6, David is presented not only as a king, but also as a criminal, as evidenced by the direct allusion to the Bathsheba story (2Sam 11). The genealogy also directs attention to the deportation to Babylon (Matt 1:11-12), since it comes after the list of Davidic kings of Juda, this deportation can be read as the consequence of the failings of these kings. Zorobabel, mentioned in verse 12, refers to the last attempt to revive the lineage of David in Haggai (2:23) and Zacharias (4:6-10) and to its failure. Matt 1:1-17 subverts Davidic messianism by revisiting the history of the Jewish people to propose the identity of Jesus as Messiah both from David and different from him. From the first lines, the Gospel of Matthew suggests that readers' interpretations of the Davidic Messiah will be transformed during the reading of the story.

If we continue this line of interpretation in the second chapter, the function of the quotation from Micah 5 in Matt 2:6 exceeds simply indicating a correspondence between the geographical location of the messianic expectation and the birth of Jesus. Micah states that Bethlehem is "one of the little clans of Judah" (Micah 5:2), As well known, Matthew's gospel reverses this perspective by stating that it is "by no means least among the rulers of Judah" (Matt 2:6). Micah mentions the coming of a perfect king/Davidic shepherd to rule Israel and stand before enemy nations. In Matthew, Jesus is presented as the accomplishment of this Davidic leader. However, he does not govern Israel literally. His leadership is of a different order than the king/shepherd of Micah who delivers the people from the Assyrians by the sword (Michah 5:5-6). As "Christ, son of David" Jesus is presented as a descendant of this royal line. Both from Bethlehem, Jesus and David share modest origins and bear the hope of salvation. Even as Matt 1 points to David's crime and the failure of Judean monarchy which culminated in the deportation to Babylon, Jesus is designated from the first chapter as the one who will "save his people" (Matt 1:21). In sum, the first chapter of Matthew legitimizes Jesus as "Christ son of David," but at the same time underscores David's negative characteristics and prepares readers to let go of the militaristically triumphant messiah to replace it with a humble crucified one. Davidic traditions can be described as a self-consuming artifact because of the way the Gospel of Matthew shifts from assertion to negation and reinterpretation. Given all of these reversals, it becomes clear that Matthew 1 is a text that creates a transformative experience in its readers.[64]

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[64] For more details, see Sébastien Doane, *Analyse de la réponse du lecteur aux origines de Jésus en Mt 1-2*, Études bibliques 81 (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 118–122.

Since such features occur at the beginning of the text, readers will then progress through the rest of the gospel paying greater attention to reversals. They will constantly question the degree of reliability of the perspective that is offered. If readers doubt that Jesus is the apogee of three series of fourteen generations, they will question the general impression that the genealogy suggests which is that the history of Israel was organized to culminate in Jesus as Messiah. This is one of the ways Matt allows readers to engage in critical reflection. They can no longer simply accept the narrator's point of view. They must think and evaluate everything for themselves.

Thus, an aspect of Matthew's gospel that has seldom been investigated by exegetes becomes apparent. While Mark and John are known for their appeal to irony and hidden meaning, Matthew has rarely been analyzed in this way. However, for attentive readers, the genealogy prepares them to read a puzzling narrative. This article proposes a deep interaction with the text to open traditional interpretations of Matthew's gospel to multivalent perceptions.

Readers who take the puzzling experience of Matt 1:17 into account, as proposed by this article, are better equipped to understand how Matthew 1 and Matthew's gospel as a whole seek to transform them to understand a paradoxical "good news." There are other instances when upon reading Matthew a proposition seems solid until it is subsequently reversed. The best example of this is the apparent defeat of Jesus, who is executed by his enemies. This is a terrible moment for readers who identify with Jesus and his cause. Yet at the end of the gospel, this apparent defeat is completely reversed by God. In a study of irony in Matthew's passion narrative, InHee Berg concludes that God saves and rules in unexpected ways.[65] In Matthew, the Beatitudes are another example of reversal, where persecution, sadness and other negative elements are inverted. In Matthew's description of an encounter with the risen Christ, the disciples paradoxically both prostrate as a gesture of faith and also harboring doubts (28:17).

The Gospel of Matthew has many undervalued reversals. The scope of this article does not permit an evaluation of these possibilities but instead offers an original way to approach and understand them. Clearly, there are different ways of assessing reversals, contradictions, ironies or tensions in a text; literary features that are not easy to distinguish from one another. Self-consuming artifacts is not necessarily the best figure to analyze all of these. Although, certain criteria can be distinguished from Fish's work. Two elements are important, according to Fish, to determine the presence of a self-consuming artifact in the reading experience: the text "consumes itself" when it directs readers to an assessment and then abandons

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65 InHee C. Berg, *Irony in the Matthean Passion Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

this outlook, it then "consumes its readers" in the work entailed to transform themselves, through what can be a painful process.

9 Conclusion

Experiencing Matt 1 as a self-consuming artifact has changed my understanding of Matthew's gospel, but more importantly, it has changed me. When I read Matt 1 for the first time, I was seeking a coherent presentation of Jesus' origins. Upon reading Matt 1 with Fish's literary theory in mind, textual features became apparent that challenged my quest for a stable meaning. My understanding of Matthew's gospel has been influenced by its explicit use to support supersessionist, anti-Jewish or antisemitic caricatures of Jews. The deicide charge reading of Matt 27:25 ("His blood be on us and on our children") and the negative discourse against "*judaios*" and "their synagogues" are profoundly disturbing when read after the *Shoa*. Experiencing Matt 1 as a self-consuming artifact enables me to counteract this issue by providing another basis to "read against the grain."[66] From the beginning, the Gospel of Matthew does not foster the intention of imposing a unique meaning. If Matthew conveys a conflict with "Jews," it is one that is also deeply rooted within Judaism.[67] If this gospel ends with an opening to all nations, it begins with a genealogy that recounts Israel's history as Jesus' origins. By experiencing a self-consuming artifact, I can no longer simply accept the narrator's point of view without question. This is not only relevant when it comes to the reconstruction of Israel's history across a bewildering number of generations, it can also generate questions regarding the different perspectives offered to address the conflicts within Judaism in Matthew's gospel.

Is it the text itself or the reading process that is self-consuming? This question presupposes that the text could be analyzed aside from its reading process. It makes sense from the point of view of narrative criticism to distinguish an objective textual phenomenon from individual reading experiences. Such an approach is incommensurable with a reader-oriented criticism perspective, and belies a simplistic view of the nature of the act of reading. Fish contends that "reading is an

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66 Gary A. Phillips develops the idea that textual Instability can be a useful tool for responsible reading of Matthew after the Shoah, in Gary A. Phillips, "Poststructural Intertextuality," in *Exploring Intertextuality: Diverse Strategies for New Testament Interpretation of Texts*, eds. B.J. Oropeza and Steve Moyise (Eugene: Cascade, 2016): 106–127.
67 Anders Runesson and Daniel M. Gurtner, eds., *Matthew within Judaism: Israel and the Nations in the First Gospel* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2020).

activity, and that meaning, insofar as it can be specified, is coextensive with that activity, and not, as some would hold, its product."[68] The critic's attention is transferred from what is happening on the page to what is happening in the reader. The object of the investigation is not the formal elements of the text, but the response of the reader which develops as they read the text. Hence, the proper object of analysis is not the work, but the act of reading. Finding meaning in a text cannot be done independently from the reading process.

If Jesus' genealogy in Matthew's gospel can be experienced as a self-consuming artifact, is it uniquely self-consuming? That is, as a self-consuming artifact, is Matthew's genealogy unusual among biblical pericopae? Scholars may be inspired by this article to identify other biblical texts that generate similar reading experiences. To proceed along this path, one should look for other *crux interpretum* that reception history show to be difficult, even seemingly impossible, to interpret and resolve. Rather than trying to figure out what an obscure biblical passage means, Fish invites critics to ask, "what is happening?" and to trace the shape of the reading experience by focusing on the act of making sense, rather than on the sense it finally makes.[69]

Not all hermeneutical difficulties are self-consuming artifacts, however. The reading process must develop in a 'conversion,' "not only a changing but an exchanging of minds," a "painful process" that Fish likens to the "sloughing off a second skin."[70] The negation process here is twofold: "the reader's self is consumed as he responds to the text," and the text is "consumed in the workings of its own effects."[71]

According to Andrew Wilson's characterization, "biblical studies remains a modernist knowledge-making discipline grounded in Enlightenment historiography."[72] Wilson points to reception history as a productive way in which "biblical scholars can become entangled in postmodern possibilities and perspectives and bring these back to their readings."[73] The current interest in biblical reception could potentially revalorize concepts such as self-consuming artifacts in the quest to describe the effects of biblical polysemic texts on their reading communities. Reception history, as Jonathan Roberts describes, is "a recognition of the dynamic,

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68 Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, xi.

69 Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, xii.

70 Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, 2.

71 Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, 3.

72 Andrew P. Wilson, *Critical Entanglements: Postmodern Theory and Biblical Studies*, Brill Research Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 48.

73 Andrew P. Wilson, *Critical Entanglements*, 56.

living relationship between texts and readers, rather than an attempt to isolate and stabilize textual meanings from the mutability of human life."[74]

In terms of counting the generations in Matt 1:2-17, numerous exegetes have reacted to a specific textual difficulty in various ways. I offer a reading of this passage as a disconcerting experience. It hints at going beyond the literal meaning by signaling readers to deconstruct what seems too obvious. The statements collapse into themselves. Readers struggle with this self-consuming artifact and this incites them to transform themselves in response to this text. The multiple reversals of Matthew's first chapter also support this interpretation. Becoming conscious of the reading experience prepares readers to experience the entire Gospel of Matthew in another light.

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74 Jonathan Roberts, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, eds. Michel Lieb, Emma Mason, Jonathan Roberts and Christopher Rowland (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 1–8 (8).

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