Bach employed the same compositional processes he used to write his Cantatas for his *St John* and *St Matthew Passions*, though both were clearly written for significantly augmented musical forces.¹ A key difference between the libretti for his Passions and those of his Cantatas is that the Passion libretti made use of a single consecutive source of Scripture for their narrative, rather than a selection of thematically related Bible texts or poetical paraphrases of Scripture as was the case with most of his Cantatas.² However, the musical building blocks—Scriptural recitatives and choruses, poetical arias and ariosos and chorales—were the same elements that make up his Cantatas, though on a grander scale. The use of the same underlying structural principles as those employed in writing a Cantata suggest that Bach’s *St John Passion* was developed from a combination of the Lutheran responsorial Passion tradition and Bach’s own Cantatas, rather than the popular contemporary Passion Oratorio.

The Passion Oratorio, popularised on the cusp of the eighteenth century in Lutheran Germany by dramatists such as Barthold Heinrich Brockes and his contemporaries, derived directly from the late-sixteenth-century Lutheran dramatisation of Scripture. Gospel harmonies such as the influential *History of the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the four Gospels* (1526) by the reformer of Northern Germany and Denmark Johannes Bugenhagen, furnished the genre with its Latin name: *Summa Passionis*, ‘gleaned from all four Passions’.³ From the 1530s onwards, the proclamation of Scripture through

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¹ NBR, no. 115, BD 2, no. 179, documents how in an exchange with the Town Council Bach argued for a performance of his *St John Passion* at St Thomas’ rather than St Nikolai on the grounds ‘that there was no room available’, requesting that ‘additional room be provided in the choir loft, so that he could place the persons needed for the music’.

² The consecutive Scriptural source, rather than a *summa Passionis* poetical paraphrase, appears to have been a requirement by the Leipzig consistory who, together with the Town Council, had final control of the libretto, see: NBR, no. 208, BD 2, no. 439, documenting the Council’s direction that the performance of a Bach Passion on Good Friday 1739 was ‘to be omitted until regular permission for the same is received’. On that occasion, Bach declined performing his own work, and instead performed a Telemann Passion, AndreasGlöckler, ‘Johann Sebastian Bachs Aufführungen zeitgenössischer Passionsmusiken’, *Bach-Jahrbuch* 66 (1977), pp. 75–119, p. 118, suggests.

³ Johannes Bugenhagen, *Die Historia des leydens vnd der Aufferstehung vnsers Herrn Jhesu*
the arts had been developed and intentionally fostered in Lutheran principalities, in particular in electoral Saxony and Brunswick. Biblically-based dramas, including some Passion and Resurrection plays, often made use of Biblically-paraphrased free verse drama coupled with audience interaction to further reformation doctrine. Key to the new genre was the presentation of the newly-translated Scriptures in a variety of vernacular forms of communication—declamation, drama and hymn—which, in combination, ensured the successful promotion of Lutheran doctrine and teaching beyond the heartlands of Luther’s reformation.

One of the first, and most prolific dramatists of Luther’s Reformation, Joachim Greff, explained this principle in the prologue of his *Tragedy of the Book of Judith in German Rhyme* (1536):

> [God’s word] is written/ read/ and sung for us/ It’s painted on our neighbours’ doors/ it’s heard in sermons everywhere/ And often is performed for us/ That we delight therein may gain.

The step from a Passion and Resurrection play such as Greff’s *Sacred New Play for Easter* (1542) or the Lutheran Passion plays of the Meistersinger Guilds in Free Imperial Cities in the 1550s and 1560s to Brockes’ *Der für die Sünden der Welt Gemarterte und Sterbende Jesus* (Jesus, Suffering and Dying for the Sins of the World) was a comparatively small one. Like Brockes’ Passion some 150 years

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5 For the success of Lutheran drama in spreading Lutheran doctrine to areas where reformation writings were banned, see: Loewe (2010), pp. 263–264.
