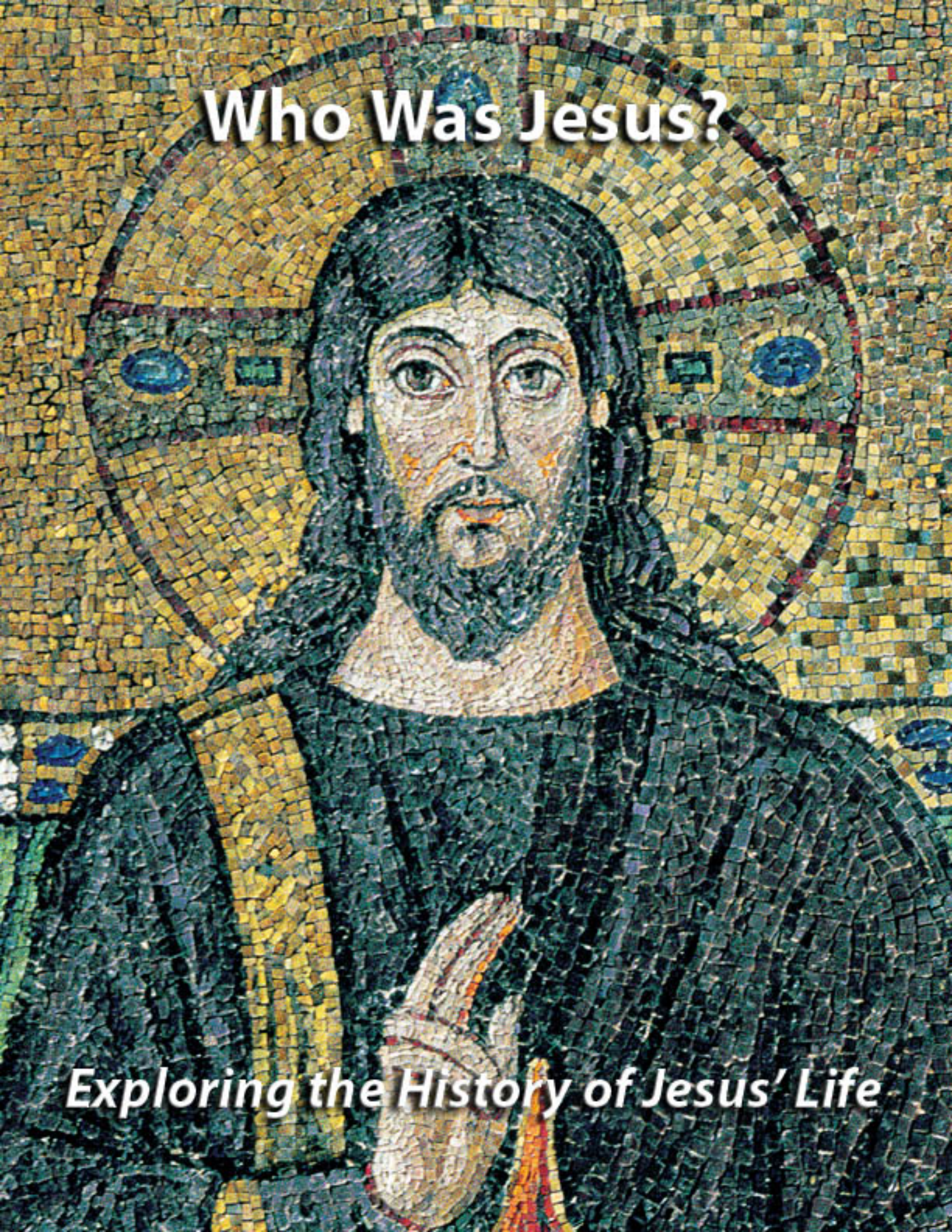
Who Was Jesus?
Exploring the History of Jesus' Life

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Introduction

Jesus is the central figure of Christianity, the world's largest religion. As a teacher in first-century Galilee, he influenced countless people. Yet many questions today surround this enigmatic person. Where was he really born—Bethlehem or Nazareth? Did he marry? Is there evidence outside of the Bible that proves he actually walked the earth? This Biblical Archaeology Society eBook, *Who Was Jesus? Exploring the History of Jesus' Life*—drawn from articles in *Biblical Archaeology Review* and *Bible Review*—examines the history of Jesus' life, from where he was born, where he grew up and whether there is extra-Biblical evidence for his existence.

Did Jesus of Nazareth really exist? What's the evidence outside of the Bible? In "Did Jesus Exist? Searching for Evidence Beyond the Bible," Lawrence Mykytiuk examines Classical and Jewish writings from the first several centuries C.E. These records give us a glimpse of the person who would become the central figure in Christianity mere decades after his crucifixion.

Where was Jesus born? The Gospels of Matthew and Luke say that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. So why is he called a Nazorean and a Galilean throughout the New Testament? In "Jesus' Birthplace and Jesus' Home," Philip J. King examines what the Bible actually says about Bethlehem, traditionally considered Jesus' birthplace, and Nazareth, Jesus' hometown.

What was Nazareth like during Jesus' time? In "Has Jesus' Nazareth House Been Found?" Ken Dark describes the excavation of an intriguing first-century "courtyard house" that may have been revered as Jesus' boyhood home in the Byzantine period. Other archaeological evidence suggests that Jesus' Nazareth was larger and wealthier than previously thought.

Modern movies and novels always want to marry Jesus off to one of his most prominent—and perhaps scandalous—female followers, Mary Magdalene. But Jesus' own words suggest he wasn't interested in such worldly matters, according to Birger A. Pearson in "Did Jesus Marry?"

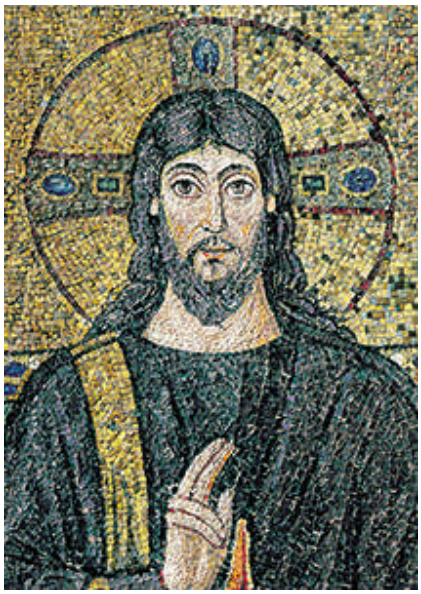
Matthew, Mark and Luke say that Jesus was crucified on Passover, suggesting that the Last Supper was a Seder, a ritual meal held in celebration of this Jewish holiday. John indicates otherwise. Who's right, if any of them? Jonathan Klawans examines this question in "Was Jesus' Last Supper a Seder?"

We hope you enjoy this journey through the history of Jesus' life. These and other fascinating insights into the Biblical world can be found in the pages of *Biblical Archaeology Review* and *Bible Review*.

Robin Ngo
Biblical Archaeology Society
2015

Did Jesus Exist? Searching for Evidence Beyond the Bible

By Lawrence Mykytiuk



Sant'Apollinare Nuovo Ravenna, Italy/Bridgeman Images

THE MAN CHRIST JESUS. Did Jesus of Nazareth exist as a real human being? Outside of the New Testament, what is the evidence for his existence? In this article, author Lawrence Mykytiuk examines the extra-Biblical textual and archaeological evidence associated with the man who would become the central figure in Christianity. Here Jesus is depicted in a vibrant sixth-century C.E. mosaic from the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy.

After two decades toiling in the quiet groves of academe, I published an article in **BAR** titled "Archaeology Confirms 50 Real People in the Bible."[a] The enormous interest this article generated was a complete surprise to me. Nearly 40 websites in six languages, reflecting a wide spectrum of secular and religious orientations, linked to **BAR**'s supplementary web page.[b] Some even posted translations.

I thought about following up with a similar article on people in the New Testament, but I soon realized that this would be so dominated by the question of Jesus' existence that I needed to consider this question separately. This is that article:

Did Jesus of Nazareth, who was called Christ, exist as a real human being, "the man Christ Jesus" according to 1 Timothy 2:5?

The sources normally discussed fall into three main categories: (1) classical (that is, Greco-Roman), (2) Jewish and (3) Christian. But when people ask whether it is possible to prove that Jesus of Nazareth actually existed, as John P. Meier pointed out decades ago, "The implication is that the Biblical evidence

for Jesus is biased because it is encased in a theological text written by committed believers. What they really want to know is: Is there extra-Biblical evidence … for Jesus' existence?"[c]

Therefore, this article will cover classical and Jewish writings almost exclusively.

Tacitus—or more formally, Caius/Gaius (or Publius) Cornelius Tacitus (55/56–c. 118 C.E.)—was a Roman senator, orator and ethnographer, and arguably the best of Roman historians. His name is based on the Latin word *tacitus*, "silent," from which we get the English word *tacit*. Interestingly, his compact prose uses silence and implications in a masterful way. One argument for the authenticity of the quotation below is that it is written in true Tacitean Latin. But first a short introduction.


C. CORNELII
TACITI
OPERA
QVÆ EXSTANT.
IVSTVS LIPSIVS postremùm recensuit.
ANTVERPIÆ,
EX OFFICINA PLANTINIANA,
Apud Ioannem Moretum.
cIↃ. IↃc.
Cum Priuilegijs Cæsareo & Regio.

Tacitus, Opera Quae Exstant, trans. by Justus Lipsius (Antwerp, Belgium: Ex officina Plantiniana, apud Joannem Moretum, 1600). Courtesy of the Philadelphia Rare Books & Manuscripts Co. (PRB&M)

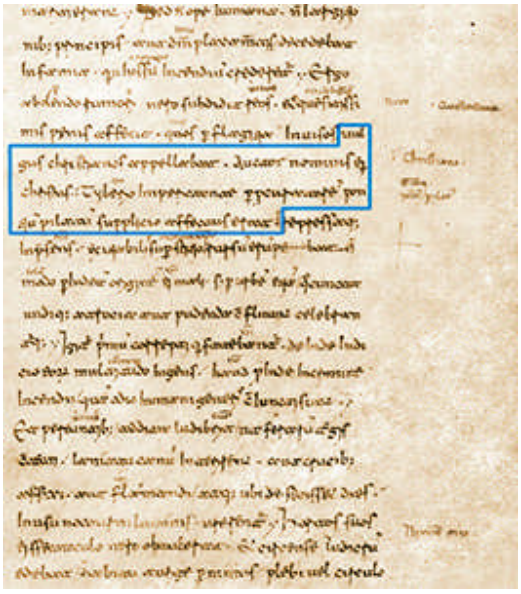
TACIT CONFIRMATION. Roman historian Tacitus's last major work, *Annals*, mentions a "Christus" who was executed by Pontius Pilate and from whom the Christians derived their name. Tacitus's brief reference corroborates historical details of Jesus' death from the New Testament. The pictured volume of Tacitus's works is from the turn of the 17th century. The volume's title page features Plantin Press's printing mark depicting angels, a compass and the motto *Labore et Constantia* ("By Labor and Constancy").

Bibliotheque nationale, Paris, France/Giraudon/Bridgeman Images

Roman historian Tacitus

Tacitus's last major work, titled *Annals*, written c. 116–117 C.E., includes a biography of Nero. In 64 C.E., during a fire in Rome, Nero was suspected of secretly ordering the burning of a part of town where he wanted to carry out a building project, so he tried to shift the blame to Christians. This was the occasion for Tacitus to mention Christians, whom he despised. This is what he wrote—the following excerpt is translated from Latin by Robert Van Voorst:

[N]either human effort nor the emperor's generosity nor the placating of the gods ended the scandalous belief that the fire had been ordered [by Nero]. Therefore, to put down the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits and punished in the most unusual ways those hated for their shameful acts … whom the crowd called "Chrestians." The founder of this name, Christ [*Christus* in Latin], had been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate … Suppressed for a time, the deadly superstition erupted again not only in Judea, the origin of this evil, but also in the city [Rome], where all things horrible and shameful from everywhere come together and become popular.



Codex Mediceus 68 II, fol. 38r, the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, Italy

CHRESTIANS OF CHRIST. Book XV of Tacitus's *Annals* is preserved in the 11th–12th-century *Codex Mediceus II*, a collection of medieval manuscripts now housed in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence, Italy, along with other manuscripts and books that belonged to the Medici family. Highlighted above is the Latin text reading "… whom the crowd called 'Chrestians.' The founder of this name, Christ, had been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate …"

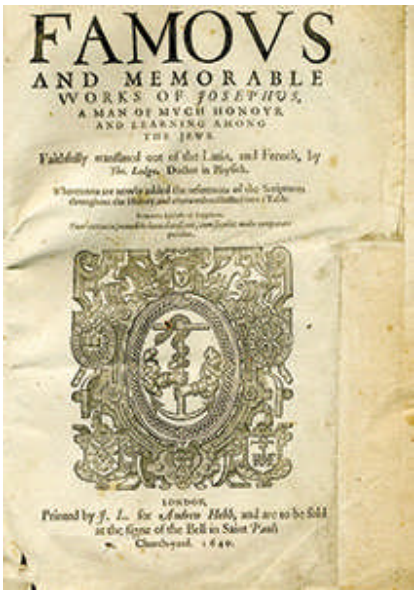
Tacitus's terse statement about "*Christus*" clearly corroborates the New Testament on certain historical details of Jesus' death. Tacitus presents four pieces of accurate knowledge about Jesus: (1) *Christus*, used by Tacitus to refer to Jesus, was one distinctive way by which some referred to him, even though Tacitus mistakenly took it for a personal name rather than an epithet or title; (2) this *Christus* was associated with the beginning of the movement of Christians, whose name originated from his; (3) he was executed by the Roman governor of Judea; and (4) the time of his death was during Pontius Pilate's governorship of Judea, during the reign of Tiberius. (Many New Testament scholars date Jesus' death to c. 29 C.E.; Pilate governed Judea in 26–36 C.E., while Tiberius was emperor 14–37 C.E.)

Tacitus, like classical authors in general, does not reveal the source(s) he used. But this should not detract from our confidence in Tacitus's assertions. Scholars generally disagree about what his sources were. Tacitus was certainly among Rome's best historians—arguably the best of all—at the top of his game as a historian and never given to careless writing.

Earlier in his career, when Tacitus was Proconsul of Asia, he likely supervised trials, questioned people accused of being Christians and judged and punished those whom he found guilty, as his friend Pliny the Younger had done when he too was a provincial governor. Thus Tacitus stood a very good

chance of becoming aware of information that he characteristically would have wanted to verify before accepting it as true.

The other strong evidence that speaks directly about Jesus as a real person comes from Josephus, a Jewish priest who grew up as an aristocrat in first-century Palestine and ended up living in Rome, supported by the patronage of three successive emperors. In the early days of the first Jewish Revolt against Rome (66–70 C.E.), Josephus was a commander in Galilee but soon surrendered and became a prisoner of war. He then prophesied that his conqueror, the Roman commander Vespasian, would become emperor, and when this actually happened, Vespasian freed him. "From then on Josephus lived in Rome under the protection of the Flavians and there composed his historical and apologetic writings" (Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz). He even took the name Flavius, after the family name of his patron, the emperor Vespasian, and set it before his birth name, becoming, in true Roman style, Flavius Josephus. Most Jews viewed him as a despicable traitor. It was by command of Vespasian's son Titus that a Roman army in 70 C.E. destroyed Jerusalem and burned the Temple, stealing its contents as spoils of war, which are partly portrayed in the imagery of their gloating triumph on the Arch of Titus in Rome. After Titus succeeded his father as emperor, Josephus accepted the son's imperial patronage, as he did of Titus's brother and successor, Domitian.


FAMOVS
AND MEMORABLE
WORKS OF *IOSEPHVS*,
A MAN OF MVCH HONOVR
AND LEARNING AMONG
THE IEWS.
Faithfully translated out of the Latin, and French, by
Tho. Lodge, Doctor in Physick.
LONDON,
Printed by *I. L.* for *Andrew Hebb*, and are to be sold
at the signe of the Bell in Saint Paul
Churchyard. 1640.

Josephus, Famovs and Memorable Works of Josephvs, trans. by Thomas Lodge (London: J. L. for Andrew Hebb, 1640).

JAMES, BROTHER OF JESUS. In *Jewish Antiquities*, parts of which are included in this mid-17th-century book of translations, Josephus refers to a James, who is described as "the brother of Jesus-who-is-called-Messiah." Josephus's mention of Jesus to specify which James was being executed by the high priest Ananus in 62 C.E. affirms the existence of the historical Jesus.

Burgerbibliothek Bern Cod. 50, f.2r

Jewish historian Josephus is pictured in the ninth-century medieval manuscript *Burgerbibliothek Bern Codex* under the Greek caption "Josippos Historiographer."

Yet in his own mind, Josephus remained a Jew both in his outlook and in his writings that extol Judaism. At the same time, by aligning himself with Roman emperors who were at that time the worst enemies of the Jewish people, he chose to ignore Jewish popular opinion.

Josephus stood in a unique position as a Jew who was secure in Roman imperial patronage and protection, eager to express pride in his Jewish heritage and yet personally independent of the Jewish community at large. Thus, in introducing Romans to Judaism, he felt free to write historical views for Roman consumption that were strongly at variance with rabbinic views.

In his two great works, *The Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities*, both written in Greek for educated people, Josephus tried to appeal to aristocrats in the Roman world, presenting Judaism as a religion to be admired for its moral and philosophical depth. *The Jewish War* doesn't mention Jesus except in some versions in likely later additions by others, but *Jewish Antiquities* does mention Jesus—twice.

The shorter of these two references to Jesus (in Book 20) is incidental to identifying Jesus' brother James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem. In the temporary absence of a Roman governor between Festus's death and governor Albinus's arrival in 62 C.E., the high priest Ananus instigated James's execution. Josephus described it:

Being therefore this kind of person [i.e., a heartless Sadducee], Ananus, thinking that he had a favorable opportunity because Festus had died and Albinus was still on his way, called a meeting

[literally, "sanhedrin"] of judges and brought into it the brother of Jesus-who-is-called-Messiah … James by name, and some others. He made the accusation that they had transgressed the law, and he handed them over to be stoned.

James is otherwise a barely noticed, minor figure in Josephus's lengthy tome. The sole reason for referring to James at all was that his death resulted in Ananus losing his position as high priest. James (Jacob) was a common Jewish name at this time. Many men named James are mentioned in Josephus's works, so Josephus needed to specify which one he meant. The common custom of simply giving the father's name (James, son of Joseph) would not work here, because James's father's name was also very common. Therefore Josephus identified this James by reference to his famous brother Jesus. But James's brother Jesus (Yehoshua) also had a very common name. Josephus mentions at least 12 other men named Jesus. Therefore Josephus specified *which* Jesus he was referring to by adding the phrase "who is called Messiah," or, since he was writing in Greek, *Christos*. This phrase was necessary to identify clearly first Jesus and, via Jesus, James, the subject of the discussion. This extraneous reference to Jesus would have made no sense if Jesus had not been a real person.

Few scholars have ever doubted the authenticity of this short account. On the contrary, the huge majority accepts it as genuine. The phrase intended to specify *which* Jesus, translated "who is called Christ," signifies either that he was mentioned earlier in the book or that readers knew him well enough to grasp the reference to him in identifying James. The latter is unlikely. First-century Romans generally had little or no idea who *Christus* was. It is much more likely that he was mentioned earlier in *Jewish Antiquities*. Also, the fact that the term "Messiah"/"Christ" is not defined here suggests that an earlier passage in *Jewish Antiquities* has already mentioned something of its significance. This phrase is also appropriate for a Jewish historian like Josephus because the reference to Jesus is a noncommittal, neutral statement about what some people called Jesus and not a confession of faith that actually asserts that he was Christ.

This phrase—"who is called Christ"—is very unlikely to have been added by a Christian for two reasons. First, in the New Testament and in the early Church Fathers of the first two centuries C.E., Christians consistently refer to James as "the brother of the Lord" or "of the Savior" and similar terms, not "the brother of Jesus," presumably because the name Jesus was very common and did not necessarily refer to their Lord. Second, Josephus's description in *Jewish Antiquities* of how and when James was executed disagrees with Christian tradition, likewise implying a non-Christian author.

This short identification of James by the title that some people used in order to specify his brother gains credibility as an affirmation of Jesus' existence because the passage is *not* about Jesus. Rather, his

name appears in a functional phrase that is called for by the sense of the passage. *It can only be useful for the identification of James if it is a reference to a real person, namely, "Jesus who is called Christ."*

This clear reference to Jesus is sometimes overlooked in debates about Josephus's other, longer reference to Jesus (to be treated next). Quite a few people are aware of the questions and doubts regarding the longer mention of Jesus, but often this other clear, simple reference and its strength as evidence for Jesus' existence does not receive due attention.

Codex Parisinus gr. 2075, 45v. Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale de France

THE TESTIMONY OF JOSEPHUS. This 15th-century manuscript, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, contains the portion of Josephus's *Testimonium Flavianum* that refers to Jesus (highlighted in blue). The first sentence of the manuscript, highlighted in green, reads, from the Greek, "Around this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man." The majority of scholars believe this passage of the *Testimonium* is based on the original writings of Josephus but contains later additions, likely made by Christian scribes.

The longer passage in Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* (Book 18) that refers to Jesus is known as the *Testimonium Flavianum*.

If it has any value in relation to the question of Jesus' existence, it counts as *additional* evidence for Jesus' existence. The *Testimonium Flavianum* reads as follows; the parts that are especially suspicious because they sound Christian are in *italics*:

Around this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, *if indeed one ought to call him a man*. For he was one who did surprising deeds, and a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. *He was the Messiah*. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of

the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who in the first place came to love him did not give up their affection for him, *for on the third day, he appeared to them restored to life. The prophets of God had prophesied this and countless other marvelous things about him*. And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, have still to this day not died out.

All surviving manuscripts of the *Testimonium Flavianum* that are in Greek, like the original, contain the same version of this passage, with no significant differences.

The main question is: Did Flavius Josephus write this entire report about Jesus and his followers, or did a forger or forgers alter it or possibly insert the whole report? There are three ways to answer this question:

Alternative 1: The whole passage is authentic, written by Josephus.

Alternative 2: The whole passage is a forgery, inserted into *Jewish Antiquities*.

Alternative 3: It is only partly authentic, containing some material from Josephus, but also some later additions by another hand(s).

Regarding Alternative 1, today almost no scholar accepts the authenticity of the entire standard Greek *Testimonium Flavianum*. In contrast to the obviously Christian statement "He was the Messiah" in the *Testimonium*, Josephus elsewhere "writes as a passionate advocate of Judaism," says Josephus expert Steve Mason. "Everywhere Josephus praises the excellent constitution of the Jews, codified by Moses, and declares its peerless, comprehensive qualities ... Josephus rejoices over converts to Judaism. In all this, there is not the slightest hint of any belief in Jesus" as seems to be reflected in the *Testimonium*.

The bold affirmation of Jesus as Messiah reads as a resounding Christian confession that echoes St. Peter himself! It cannot be Josephus. Alternative 1 is clearly out.

Regarding Alternative 2—the whole *Testimonium Flavianum* is a forgery—this is very unlikely. What is said, and the expressions in Greek that are used to say it, despite a few words that don't seem characteristic of Josephus, generally fit much better with Josephus's writings than with Christian writings. It is hypothetically possible that a forger could have learned to imitate Josephus's style or that a reviser adjusted the passage to that style, but such a deep level of attention, based on an extensive, detailed reading of Josephus's works and such a meticulous adoption of his vocabulary and style, goes far beyond what a forger or a reviser would need to do.

Even more important, the short passage (treated above) that mentions Jesus in order to identify James appears in a later section of the book (Book 20) and implies that Jesus was mentioned previously.

The best-informed among the Romans understood *Christus* to be nothing more than a man's personal name, on the level of Publius and Marcus. First-century Romans generally had no idea that calling someone "*Christus*" was an exalted reference, implying belief that he was *the* chosen one, God's anointed. The *Testimonium*, in Book 18, appropriately found in the section that deals with Pilate's time as governor of Judea, is apparently one of Josephus's characteristic digressions, this time occasioned by mention of Pilate. It provides background for Josephus's only other written mention of Jesus (in Book 20), and it connects the name Jesus with his Christian followers. The short reference to Jesus in the later book depends on the longer one in the earlier (Book 18). If the longer one is not genuine, this passage lacks its essential background. Alternative 2 should be rejected.

Alternative 3—that the *Testimonium Flavianum* is based on an original report by Josephus that has been modified by others, probably Christian scribes, seems most likely. After extracting what appear to be Christian additions, the remaining text appears to be pure Josephus. As a Romanized Jew, Josephus would not have presented these beliefs as his own. Interestingly, in three openly Christian, non-Greek versions of the *Testimonium Flavianum* analyzed by Steve Mason, variations indicate changes were made by others besides Josephus. The Latin version says Jesus "was *believed to be* the Messiah." The Syriac version is best translated, "He was thought to be the Messiah." And the Arabic version with open coyness suggests, "He was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders." Alternative 3 has the support of the overwhelming majority of scholars.

We can learn quite a bit about Jesus from Tacitus and Josephus, two famous historians who were not Christian. Almost all the following statements about Jesus, which are asserted in the New Testament, are corroborated or confirmed by the relevant passages in Tacitus and Josephus. These independent historical sources—one a non-Christian Roman and the other Jewish—confirm what we are told in the Gospels:

1. He existed as a man. The historian Josephus grew up in a priestly family in first-century Palestine and wrote only decades after Jesus' death. Jesus' known associates, such as Jesus' brother James, were his contemporaries. The historical and cultural context was second nature to Josephus. "If any Jewish writer were ever in a position to know about the non-existence of Jesus, it would have been Josephus. His implicit affirmation of the existence of Jesus has been, and still is, the most significant obstacle for those who argue that the extra-Biblical evidence is not probative on this point," Robert Van Voorst observes. And Tacitus was careful enough not to report real executions of nonexistent people.

2. His personal name was Jesus, as Josephus informs us.

3. He was called *Christos* in Greek, which is a translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*, both of which mean "anointed" or "(the) anointed one," as Josephus states and Tacitus implies, unaware, by reporting, as Romans thought, that his name was *Christus*.

4. He had a brother named James (Jacob), as Josephus reports.

5. He won over both Jews and "Greeks" (i.e., Gentiles of Hellenistic culture), according to Josephus, although it is anachronistic to say that they were "many" at the end of his life. Large growth in the number of Jesus' actual followers came only after his death.

6. Jewish leaders of the day expressed unfavorable opinions about him, at least according to some versions of the *Testimonium Flavianum*.

7. Pilate rendered the decision that he should be executed, as both Tacitus and Josephus state.

8. His execution was specifically by crucifixion, according to Josephus.

9. He was executed during Pontius Pilate's governorship over Judea (26–36 C.E.), as Josephus implies and Tacitus states, adding that it was during Tiberius's reign.

Some of Jesus' followers did not abandon their personal loyalty to him even after his crucifixion but submitted to his teaching. They believed that Jesus later appeared to them alive in accordance with prophecies, most likely those found in the Hebrew Bible. A well-attested link between Jesus and Christians is that Christ, as a term used to identify Jesus, became the basis of the term used to identify his followers: Christians. The Christian movement began in Judea, according to Tacitus. Josephus observes that it continued during the first century. Tacitus deplores the fact that during the second century it had spread as far as Rome.

As far as we know, no ancient person ever seriously argued that Jesus did not exist. Referring to the first several centuries C.E., even a scholar as cautious and thorough as Robert Van Voorst freely observes, "… [N]o pagans and Jews who opposed Christianity denied Jesus' historicity or even questioned it."

Nondenial of Jesus' existence is particularly notable in rabbinic writings of those first several centuries C.E.: "… [I]f anyone in the ancient world had a reason to dislike the Christian faith, it was the rabbis. To argue successfully that Jesus never existed but was a creation of early Christians would have been the most effective polemic against Christianity … [Yet] all Jewish sources treated Jesus as a fully historical person … [T]he rabbis … used the real events of Jesus' life against him" (Van Voorst).

Thus his birth, ministry and death occasioned claims that his birth was illegitimate and that he performed miracles by evil magic, encouraged apostasy and was justly executed for his own sins. But they do not deny his existence.

Lucian of Samosata (c. 115–200 C.E.) was a Greek satirist who wrote *The Passing of Peregrinus*, about a former Christian who later became a famous Cynic and revolutionary and died in 165 C.E. In two sections of *Peregrinus*—here translated by Craig A. Evans—Lucian, while discussing Peregrinus's career, without naming Jesus, clearly refers to him, albeit with contempt in the midst of satire:

It was then that he learned the marvelous wisdom of the Christians, by associating with their priests and scribes in Palestine. And—what else?—in short order he made them look like children, for he was a prophet, cult leader, head of the congregation and everything, all by himself. He interpreted and explained some of their books, and wrote many himself. They revered him as a god, used him as a lawgiver, and set him down as a protector—to be sure, after that other whom they still worship, the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world.

For having convinced themselves that they are going to be immortal and live forever, the poor wretches despise death and most even willingly give themselves up. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshiping that crucified sophist himself and living according to his laws.

Although Lucian was aware of the Christians' "books" (some of which might have been parts of the New Testament), his many bits of misinformation make it seem very likely that he did not read them. The compound term "priests and scribes," for example, seems to have been borrowed from Judaism, and indeed, Christianity and Judaism were sometimes confused among classical authors.

Lucian seems to have gathered all of his information from sources independent of the New Testament and other Christian writings. For this reason, this writing of his is usually valued as independent evidence for the existence of Jesus.

This is true despite his ridicule and contempt for Christians and their "crucified sophist." "Sophist" was a derisive term used for cheats or for teachers who only taught for money. Lucian despised Christians for worshiping someone thought to be a criminal worthy of death and especially despised "the man who was crucified."

Other testimony that has some value, but much less, as evidence regarding the existence of Jesus appears in the writings of the following people:

- Celsus, the Platonist philosopher, considered Jesus to be a magician who made exorbitant claims.

- Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor and friend of Tacitus, wrote about early Christian worship of Christ "as to a god."

- Suetonius, a Roman writer, lawyer and historian, wrote of riots in 49 C.E. among Jews in Rome which might have been about Christus but which he thought were incited by "the instigator Chrestus," whose identification with Jesus is not completely certain.

- Mara bar Serapion, a prisoner of war held by the Romans, wrote a letter to his son that described "the wise Jewish king" in a way that seems to indicate Jesus but does not specify his identity.

Other documentary sources are doubtful or irrelevant.

One can label the evidence treated above as documentary (sometimes called *literary*) or as archaeological. Almost all sources covered above exist in the form of documents that have been copied and preserved over the course of many centuries, rather than excavated in archaeological digs. Therefore, although some writers call them archaeological evidence, I prefer to say that these truly ancient texts are ancient *documentary* sources, rather than *archaeological* discoveries.

Some ossuaries (bone boxes) have come to light that are inscribed simply with the name Jesus (*Yeshu* or *Yeshua'* in Hebrew), but no one suggests that this was Jesus of Nazareth. The name Jesus was very common at this time, as was Joseph. So as far as we know, these ordinary ossuaries have nothing to do with the New Testament Jesus. Even the ossuary from the East Talpiot district of Jerusalem, whose inscription is translated "Yeshua', son of Joseph," does not refer to him.

As for the famous James ossuary first published in 2002,[d] whose inscription is translated "Jacob, son of Joseph, brother of Yeshua'," more smoothly rendered, "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus," it is

unprovenanced, and it will likely take decades to settle the matter of whether it is authentic. Following well-established, sound methodology, I do not base conclusions on materials whose authenticity is uncertain, because they might be forged. Therefore the James ossuary, which is treated in many other publications, is not included here.

As a final observation: In New Testament scholarship generally, a number of specialists consider the question of whether Jesus existed to have been finally and conclusively settled in the affirmative. A few vocal scholars, however, still deny that he ever lived.

Jesus' Birthplace and Jesus' Home

By Philip J. King

According to the Gospels, Jesus was born in Bethlehem but lived in Nazareth. While there has been a lot of scholarly discussion about whether or not he was actually born in Bethlehem,[a] both places are useful for teaching about the historical Jesus—regardless of any perceived conflict—and inspire us to take a deeper look at how Jesus was influenced by his environment.

The Biblical towns of Bethlehem and Nazareth are strikingly different from each other in many ways; at the same time they figure prominently in the life and ministry of Jesus. The issue to be discussed is the birthplace of Jesus. It seems clear from the infancy narratives in the Gospels that Bethlehem was the place of Jesus' birth: "In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?'" (Matthew 2:1–2); "Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem … He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son" (Luke 2:4–7).

The infancy narratives in the Gospels give no indication that Jesus was born elsewhere.

The Gospel of John also attests that the birth of Jesus took place in Bethlehem: "Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?" (John 7:42).

Micah, one of the four great prophets of the eighth century B.C.E., is responsible for the classic messianic poem wherein a new David shall arise from Bethlehem, the birthplace of David, to rule in a future age: "But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days" (Micah 5:2). The New Testament interprets this poem as a reference to Jesus' birth.

The family of David was closely associated with Bethlehem. The Lord sent Samuel to Bethlehem to find a replacement for King Saul from among the sons of Jesse. When David was presented, the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one" (1 Samuel 16:12). Then Samuel anointed David in the presence of his brothers, and the spirit of the Lord descended upon David from that day on. The name Bethlehem first occurs in 1 Samuel 16:4.

Nazareth, an obscure agricultural village in Southern Galilee, is not mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), in the Talmud or by the historian Josephus. Joseph may have settled in Nazareth because of its proximity to Sepphoris[b] where opportunities for work were readily available when Herod Antipas was reconstructing his capital there. Jesus and his family probably spent a significant amount of time at Nazareth. Luke's Gospel is a valuable source of information about Jesus' childhood. For example, Luke relates that Jesus and his parents were still living at Nazareth when Jesus was 12 years old. Every year Jesus and his parents went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival and then returned to Nazareth. Luke relates that on one particular year Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, unbeknownst to Mary and Joseph, to engage in discussion with the teachers in the Temple. Subsequently, he went with his parents and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them (Luke 2:41–51).

During his public life, Jesus visited Nazareth infrequently because he had not been received cordially there; according to Luke 4:16–27, quite the contrary occurred: "When they heard this, all in the [Nazareth] synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff" (Luke 4:28–29). What sparked this outrage was that in the synagogue of Nazareth Jesus had declared himself the fulfillment of prophecy (Luke 4:21). The Temple in Jerusalem manifested an aversion to everything foreign—not so the synagogue.

It is obvious from the foregoing that Nazareth derives its importance entirely from its relationship to the life and teaching of Jesus.

The term "Nazarene" (the Greek word has two different spellings [see below, Matthew 2:23], both understood as references to Nazareth) is applied to Jesus in all four of the Gospels and in Acts. Otherwise the derivation and meaning of this word are surrounded by conjecture. It may be a play on Isaiah's prophecy that "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse [that is, from the family of David's father], and a branch [historical king; Hebrew *netzer*] shall grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1). This passage projects into the future the expectation of an ideal king.

"After being warned in a dream, he [Joseph] went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazorean'" (Matthew 2:22–23). The source of this citation is unknown.

When evaluating Biblical literature some readers are disappointed to learn what they had been reading is not fact but fiction. If the material is not a blow-by-blow description of a person or event, its value in their estimation has been compromised. For those who have been trained in mathematical

precision, the presumption is that anything less is devalued. Just the facts, they say; anything less is watered down. For them this narrow approach will produce an end product that is both bland and vapid.

On the other hand, literature that is the product of creativity and imagination is rich and vibrant. It is the difference between prose and poetry.

All of us should be enriched by our environment—not untouched by it. So too in the time of Jesus. My purpose in this column is to illustrate how both Nazareth and Bethlehem influenced Jesus.

Has Jesus' Nazareth House Been Found?

By Ken Dark

Ken Dark

HOME OF JESUS? Pictured is the rock-cut doorway of the first-century house at the Sisters of Nazareth Convent. The combination of rock-built construction and quarried-rock construction can be seen clearly. The door opens to the "Chambre Obscure," another part of the original house structure partly cut out of the natural rock. The rock overhang in the corner is naturally occurring and was likely left in its current form to support the roof. In front of the doorway, a fragment of the original floor survives.

What was Nazareth like when Jesus lived there? The evidence is sparse but intriguing.

Surprising as it may seem, very little archaeological work has been done in Nazareth itself. However, a site within the Sisters of Nazareth Convent, across the street from the Church of the Annunciation, may contain some of the best evidence of the small town that existed here in Jesus' time. Although known since the 1880s, this had never previously been properly published or even studied by professional archaeologists—until the Nazareth Archaeological Project began work here in 2006.[1]

NAZARETH. The excavation site in the cellar of the Sisters of Nazareth Convent (A) may reveal the childhood home of Jesus. Finds from this site and those in the vicinity of the Church of the Annunciation (B) and the International Marian Center (C) suggest that the town of Nazareth was somewhat larger and wealthier than often portrayed.

Ancient Nazareth was served by three to seven springs, two of which, the Apostles' Fountain (E) and Mary's Well (D), are still known.

The story begins with the chance discovery of an ancient cistern in the 1880s, shortly after the convent was built. Excavations were then undertaken by the nuns, their workmen and even children from their school. They exposed a complex sequence of unusually well preserved archaeological features, including Crusader-period walls and vaults, a Byzantine cave-church, Roman-period tombs and other rock-cut and built structures. The nuns made a small museum of the pottery, coins, glass and other portable artifacts that they recovered. Then construction of the new convent buildings revealed the walls of a large Byzantine church with a triple apse, polychrome mosaic floors and white marble fittings, rebuilt in the Crusader period.

Did all this ancient construction, including churches and burials, indicate that the site was considered holy, or at least of some importance, at various periods after Jesus' time? Was this perhaps founded on a belief that the site was somehow related to Jesus' home?

In 1936, the Jesuit Father Henri Senès, who had been an architect before entering the Church, recorded the previously exposed structures in great detail and undertook some further, though limited, excavations. Unfortunately Senès never published his work (apart from a brief guide pamphlet). But he did leave a substantial archive of notes and drawings, little known outside the convent, to which the nuns have graciously given us access.

Within the Sisters of Nazareth Convent is the first-century "courtyard house." While excavation in this area was initiated in 1880, it was not until the Nazareth Archaeological Project began their investigation in 2006 that the site was studied by professional archaeologists.

Rotem Hofman

In 2006, we began to reexamine the site. It soon became clear that there was a lengthy chronological sequence of well-preserved structures and features. This included the successive Crusader and Byzantine churches, two Early Roman-period tombs, a phase of small-scale quarrying and, of particular note, a rectilinear structure with partly rock-cut and partly stone-built walls.

The rectilinear structure was cut through by the forecourt of a tomb dated to the first century; therefore the rectilinear structure must have been built earlier than this time. That this structure also dated to the Roman period was confirmed by the Kefar Hananya-type pottery (standard domestic pottery of Roman-period Galilee; see photo p. 62), the date of which is otherwise known.[2] Probable fragments of limestone vessels indicate that the inhabitants were very likely Jewish. Limestone vessels are not subject to impurity under Jewish law and were therefore very popular in Jewish communities at this time.

The east side of the structure originally had rock built walls, as this part of the house was built away from the naturally occurring rock cave. The visible wall was rebuilt in the Crusader period but may incorporate remains of the first-century A.D. wall.

Ken Dark

What sort of building was this rectilinear structure? It had been constructed by cutting back a limestone hillside as it sloped toward the wadi (valley) below, leaving carefully smoothed freestanding rock walls, to which stone-built walls were added. The structure included a series of rooms. One, with its doorway, survived to its full height. Another had a stairway rising adjacent to one of its walls. A rock overhang had been carefully retained in one room, its upper surface worked to support part of a roof or upper story—which otherwise must have been built of another material, probably timber. Just inside the surviving doorway, earlier excavations had revealed part of its original chalk floor. Associated finds, including cooking pottery and a spindle whorl, suggested domestic occupation.

Taken together, the walls conformed to the plan of a so-called courtyard house, one of the typical architectural forms of Early Roman-period settlements in the Galilee.

The excellent preservation of this rectilinear structure or house can be explained by its later history. Great efforts had been made to encompass the remains of this building within the vaulted cellars of both the Byzantine and Crusader churches, so that it was thereafter protected.

Initially puzzling was the use of the site for Jewish burial. Although domestic occupation was of course prohibited by Jewish law on burial sites, burial on a disused domestic site was another matter. The burials were also separated from domestic occupation by a phase of quarrying. It is clear the house was already disused before the site was used for tombs. The immediate area was mostly destroyed before the tombs were constructed. Consequently, the apparent conflict between domestic occupation and burial is an illusory one. The house must date from the first century A.D. or earlier. No stratified pottery earlier or later than the Early Roman period was discovered in layers associated with the house.[3]

ROLLING TOMB STONE. The forecourt of this tomb cuts through the courtyard house that may have once been Jesus' home. Initially this was confusing, as Jewish law would not permit burials to take place near habitations, but the courtyard house had been abandoned prior to the installation of the tombs as evidenced by a period of quarrying. Both structures date to the first century A.D. The rock "door" would be similar to the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb of Jesus, which was rolled away at the resurrection (Mark 16:3; Matthew 28:2; Luke 24:2; John 20:1).

Ken Dark

In 2009, another first-century courtyard house was discovered nearby—in a salvage (or rescue) excavation directed by Yardenna Alexandre of the Israel Antiquities Authority prior to the construction of the International Marian Center next to the Church of the Annunciation.[4] This reveals a structure similar to the Sisters of Nazareth house. The principal difference between the two structures is that the Marian Center structure has fewer rock-cut components as it was built on relatively flat ground farther away from the side of the hill.

Consequently, we now have two first-century courtyard houses from central Nazareth. These, together with the other earlier discoveries at the Church of the Annunciation, provide evidence for an Early Roman Jewish settlement that was larger, and perhaps slightly wealthier, than is often envisaged. Such evidence would be consistent with what archaeologists of the Roman provinces elsewhere conventionally term a "small town": a large village, perhaps perceived by contemporaries as a small urban center, serving as a focus for smaller agricultural communities nearby.

Nazareth was served by at least three, and possibly as many as seven, springs or wells. St. Mary's Well is perhaps the best known of these. Another is the so-called Apostles' Fountain near the modern Mensa Church. We found another spring in the course of our fieldwork at the Sisters of Nazareth Convent; it remains accessible through its Crusader-period wellhead. Another water source is implied by an unpublished plan of about 1900 in the convent archive, where a water channel is shown leading from the so-called Synagogue Church, north of the convent. According to Gottfried Schumacher, in the 19th century local people knew of another spring located to the south.[5] The Palestine Exploration Fund's famous *Survey of Western Palestine* in the 1870s recorded a well within the Franciscan precinct of the Church of the Annunciation. Finally, in his 1923 *Das Land Der Bibel*, Paul Range says he saw another spring west of the Old City of Nazareth.

The hinterland of Nazareth is oriented to the north. To the south a high rocky ridge cuts off easy movement by foot or animal-drawn cart. To the north, however, a relatively gentle walk leads to the Nahal Zippori, the broad valley between Nazareth and the Roman town of Sepphoris (Zippori in Hebrew). This valley is well watered by the stream that flows along its center and by numerous springs and a few rivulets on its slopes. The part of Nahal Zippori closest to Nazareth was probably the agricultural hinterland of the settlement.

Between 2004 and 2010, the Nazareth Archaeological Project surveyed a wide transect across Nahal Zippori. We identified a series of previously unknown Early Roman-period sites, probably farms and small villages, which (with just two exceptions) had no pre-Roman material. At a few sites we also found evidence of quarrying.

It may be possible to say something of the cultural identity of those living in the Nahal Zippori at this time. All the sites on the south side of the valley, nearer to Nazareth, featured Kefar Hananya-type pottery. Some also had the type of limestone vessels associated elsewhere with Jewish settlements. However, all of those on the north side of the valley, nearer Sepphoris, had a much wider range of artifacts, including red-slipped imported Eastern Terra Sigillata pottery and imported amphora. Communities closer to Sepphoris apparently embraced the cultural world of the Roman provinces; those closer to Nazareth chose a strictly Jewish material culture, perhaps denoting a more conservative attitude to religious belief and concepts of purity and rejecting "Roman" culture as a whole.[a]

Nowhere else in the Roman Empire is there such a seemingly clear-cut boundary between people accepting and those rejecting Roman culture, even along the imperial Roman frontiers. This suggests that the Nazareth area was unusual for the strength of its anti-Roman sentiment and/or the strength of its Jewish identity. It also suggests that there was no close connection between Nazareth and Sepphoris in the Early Roman period. Perhaps these places occupied focal roles in separate "settlement systems" on either side of the valley.

Some recent scholarship has argued that the Roman culture of Sepphoris, closer than 5 miles from Nazareth, would have played an important part in Jesus' youth. Sepphoris, with its shop-lined streets, mosaic-floored townhouses and monumental public buildings, might initially appear to support this contention. But the Sepphoris seen by visitors today is largely a later construction. Very little of what is known of Sepphoris may be assigned with certainty to the early first century.

The first-century evidence that we do have from Sepphoris suggests an urban center with an administrative function, domestic occupation and public buildings. It may have been relatively cosmopolitan, in the sense that it was open to Roman provincial culture, but it remained a Jewish community.

By contrast, Nazareth was a local center without the trappings of Roman culture, perhaps analogous to nearby Capernaum or Chorazin in its facilities and scale, rather than to Sepphoris (which, incidentally, is not mentioned in the New Testament). The description in the Gospels of the Nazareth synagogue (Mark 6:1–6; Matthew 13:54–58; Luke 4:16–30) is exactly the sort of building we would expect in an Early Roman provincial "small town." Such a small town was also exactly the sort of place where one might expect to find a rural craftsman—a *tekton* (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55)—like Joseph.

This evidence suggests that Jesus' boyhood was spent in a conservative Jewish community that had little contact with Hellenistic or Roman culture. (It is extremely unlikely to be the sort of place where, as some have argued, one would have encountered "cynic" philosophy.)

None of this, of course, has any explicit connection with Jesus. There is one possible connection, however. A seventh-century pilgrim account known as *De Locus Sanctis*, written by Adomnán of Iona, describes two large churches in the center of Nazareth. One is identifiable as the Church of the Annunciation, located just across the modern street from the Sisters of Nazareth Convent. The other stood nearby and was built over vaults that also contained a spring and the remains of two tombs, *tumuli* in Adomnán's "Insular Latin." Between these two tombs, Adomnán tells us, was the house in which Jesus was raised. From this is derived the more recent name for the church that Adomnán describes: the Church of the Nutrition, that is, "the church of the upbringing of Christ," the location of which has been lost.[6]

At the Sisters of Nazareth Convent there was evidence of a large Byzantine church with a spring and two tombs in its crypt. The first-century house described at the beginning of this article, probably a courtyard house, stands between the two tombs. Both the tombs and the house were decorated with mosaics in the Byzantine period, suggesting that they were of special importance, and possibly venerated. Only here have we evidence for all the characteristics that *De Locus Sanctis* ascribes to the Church of the Nutrition, including the house.

Was this the house where Jesus grew up? It is impossible to say on archaeological grounds. On the other hand, there is no good archaeological reason why such an identification should be discounted. What we can say is that this building was probably where the Byzantine church builders believed Jesus had spent his childhood in Nazareth.

Did Jesus Marry?

By Birger A. Pearson

Collection Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg / Photo by Scala / Art Resource, NY

Mary Magdalene reaches out to the risen Jesus beside his tomb, but he spurns her, saying "Touch me not"—in Latin, *Noli me tangere* (John 20:16–18). Longstanding tradition identifies Mary Magdalene as a repentant whore. Her long dark tresses and red dress in this 1835 painting by Russian artist Alexander Ivanov are intended to recall her promiscuous past. In more recent years, however, scholars and novelists alike have suggested that the Magdalene was also Jesus' wife. In the accompanying article, Birger A. Pearson examines the evidence—both from extrabiblical accounts of Mary as well as from Jesus' own conversations about marriage—in order to declare this marriage null and void.

There is not the slightest hint in the New Testament that Jesus ever married. Yet, Jesus' marital status has become a hot topic—again—as a result of the best-selling book *The Da Vinci Code*.[1] Novelist Dan Brown claims not only that Jesus married Mary Magdalene, but that the happy couple bore a daughter who became the ancestress of the Merovingian dynasty of France.

In 1970 New Testament scholar William Phipps created a smaller-scale sensation with his work of nonfiction, *Was Jesus Married?*[2] Noting that in Jesus' day, all ordinary Jewish men were expected to marry, Phipps suggested Jesus was probably no exception. According to Phipps, Jesus would have married by the time he turned 18.

As to who Jesus' wife might have been, Phipps also suggested Mary Magdalene as the most likely candidate (see box). Phipps offered the following scenario: Jesus married Mary Magdalene during the second decade of his life, and she became an adulteress.[3] Jesus forgave her, and she repented, staying faithful to him until the end. His experience with her contributed to his strong stand against divorce. In a later book, *The Sexuality of Jesus*, Phipps admitted that although he believed Mary Magdalene was the most likely candidate for Jesus' wife, no certainty could be achieved on the question. He concluded: "It is considerably more risky to attempt to identify whom Jesus married than it is to affirm that he married."[4]

But is it really possible that Jesus married? One answer to that question is: Anything is possible. After all, we know precious little about Jesus' life before we encounter him in the Gospels in connection with the activity of John the Baptist sometime around 27 C.E. (Luke 3:1). We know that he grew up in the Galilean town of Nazara (Matthew 4:13; Luke 4:16) or Nazareth (Mark 1:9; John 1:45–46), that his mother's name was Mary (probably Miriam in Hebrew), his father was a carpenter named Joseph, and he had four brothers and at least three sisters (Matthew 13:55–56; Mark 6:3; Luke 4:22; Acts 1:14). But we do not know much else of his early years. So what was he doing before he fell in with John?

Phipps answers this question by assuming that Jesus did what almost all young Jewish men did. In *The Da Vinci Code*, however, Dan Brown claims that Jesus' marriage to Mary is a matter of historical record, attested in ancient writings suppressed by the Church. According to Brown, in order to cover up the secret relationship between Mary and Jesus, the Church smeared Mary by creating the legend that she had been a whore (it is not in the New Testament; see box).

Brown mentions "countless references to Jesus and Magdalene's union" in the ancient record, but he cites only two apocryphal gospels, both of them texts preserved in Coptic: the *Gospel of Philip*, known from a fourth-century copy found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, and the *Gospel of Mary*, known from a fifth-century copy.[5] Phipps also relied on the *Gospel of Philip* in concocting his vision of Jesus' and Mary's life together.[6]

The *Gospel of Philip* was originally written in Greek, probably sometime in the third century, probably somewhere in Syria. The title of the *Gospel of Philip* is likely not original, and is evidently based on the observation that Philip is the only apostle named in it. The text consists of a compendium of teachings on various subjects reflecting the tradition of an eastern branch of the Valentinian school of Gnostic Christianity.[a] Unfortunately the manuscript is damaged, and there are lacunae, or gaps, in the text. The passage given in *The Da Vinci Code* reads as follows (with brackets indicating lacunae):

And the companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene. [... loved] her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] kiss her [often] on her [...]. The rest of [the disciples ...]. They said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?" The Savior answered and said to them, "Why do I not love you like her"?[7]

The first two lacunae can safely be restored as references to Jesus ("the Savior"), and "mouth" is a likely restoration for the third lacuna, so the text could read: "And the companion of the Savior was Mary Magdalene. The Savior loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth."

There are actually two passages in the *Gospel of Philip* relating to Mary (although Brown only quotes this one). The other passage reads:

There were three who always walked with the lord: Mary his mother and <his>[8] sister and the Magdalene, the one who was called his companion. His sister and his mother and his companion were each a Mary.[9]

An accurate interpretation of these passages from the *Gospel of Philip* is by no means obvious.[10] A sexual relationship between Mary and Jesus cannot be ruled out *a priori* . But it does seem unlikely. First, both passages refer to Mary Magdalene three times as Jesus' "companion." The Greek word *koinonos* is used twice, and its Coptic equivalent *hotre* is used once.[11] The word can also be translated as "partner" (in business), "fellow-member" (of a society), "accomplice" (in crime) or "sharer" (in something). But I know of no instance where the word means "spouse," though it is not out of the question that the word could be used for a sexual "partner." The reference to the savior's "kissing" Mary might also be interpreted romantically, but it is more likely a reference to the chaste, liturgical "kiss of peace" mentioned several times in the *Gospel of Philip* and the New Testament (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14).[12]

More importantly, immediately following the first passage quoted above, Jesus goes on to explain Mary's special role in terms of her capacity to receive his instruction—and not her sex appeal. When, in the *Gospel of Philip,* the disciples ask Jesus why he loves Mary more than them, Jesus responds, "Why do I not love you like her?" He then answers his own question: "When a blind man and one who sees are both together in darkness, they are no different from one another. When the light comes, then he who sees will see the light, and he who is blind will remain in darkness."[13] Jesus is suggesting that he favors Mary because she is like a sighted person compared with the dullard male disciples, who are like blind men. Thus, Mary's "companionship" is spiritual rather than physical. When quoting this passage, Brown conveniently left off the second half.

In any case, there is no indication at all in the *Gospel of Philip* that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were man and wife. A sexual relationship might be read into that gospel, but it seems a stretch. Further, no conclusion about Jesus' historical relationship to Mary Magdalene should be drawn from a third-century Gnostic text like the *Gospel of Philip*.

The second noncanonical gospel Dan Brown relies on in *The Da Vinci Code* is the *Gospel of Mary*,[14] which was originally written in Greek, probably sometime in the mid-second century. It consists of a revelation dialogue between Jesus and his disciples, and a report of a revelation given by Jesus to

Mary. Unfortunately the text is incomplete; several pages are missing from the manuscript. The only passage quoted in *The Da Vinci Code* reads as follows (the unnamed woman is Mary):[15]

Peter answered and spoke concerning these same things. He questioned them about the Savior: "Did he really speak with a woman without our knowledge (and) not openly? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?" ... Levi answered and said to Peter, "Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us."[16]

Out of context—which is how Dan Brown presents this quotation—the text could be read to suggest that Jesus had an intimate relationship with his beloved Mary, and that he didn't want the other disciples to know about it.

But when the passage is read in context, we get a very different impression of their relationship, as described by the *Gospel of Mary.* Just before Peter made this speech, Mary had recounted a revelation she had received in a vision she had of the Savior, and the disciple Andrew had commented that "these teachings are strange ideas." Then Peter speaks. At issue here is whether or not Mary's account of her experiences is valid. Levi's comment that the Savior "loved her more than us" is based on his observation that she has been given instruction that has apparently been denied to the male disciples. Nothing is said of any sexual relationship between Jesus and Mary, least of all any hint of marriage between them.

Jesus' special love for Mary is mentioned earlier in the *Gospel of Mary*, too. Mary is discussing with the other (male) disciples teachings they had heard from the Savior. At one point Peter says to Mary, "Sister, we know that the Savior loved you more than the rest of women. Tell us the words of the Savior which you remember—which you know (but) we do not, nor have we heard them."[17] Mary then recounts what she learned in a vision of the Savior. Peter is suggesting that of all the female followers of Jesus, Mary is the favored one. No sexual relationship is implied, only that Mary has a greater capacity to understand and act upon Jesus' teachings.

Thus, the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Mary* lend no support whatsoever to William Phipps's and Dan Brown's independent suggestions that Jesus married Mary Magdalene. The *Gospel of Mary* underscores her role *vis-à-vis* Jesus' male disciples as an authoritative source for his esoteric teaching, but there is nothing in it to support the notion that Jesus and Mary were man and wife. While a sexual relationship between Mary and Jesus cannot be completely ruled out in the *Gospel of Philip*'s treatment of Mary, their relationship is more likely to be seen as a spiritual one. Completely absent from the *Gospel of Philip* is the notion that Jesus and Mary were man and wife.

As for Phipps's suggestion that Jesus must have married because that's what young Jewish men did in his day—no certainty can be achieved on this point. Nothing at all in our meager sources, biblical or extrabiblical, suggests that Jesus ever did get married. But there is something in the New Testament that suggests Jesus probably didn't: Jesus' own attitude toward marriage.

It is not really possible to know, for lack of evidence, how Jesus felt about marriage in his formative years. It is possible to determine, based on his teachings in the Gospels, what he thought during his later years as a public prophet. From his teachings, we can extrapolate what his marital state was at the time.

Interestingly, Jesus' attitude toward marriage and procreation relates directly to Jesus' most basic and central message: that the kingdom of God was at hand. The "kingdom" or "rule" of God was another term for the Age to Come, when evil would finally be abolished, and God's reign established on earth for all time. According to some apocalyptic thinkers of the day—including Jesus—the dead would be resurrected at this time.

The nearness in time of the kingdom of God was a concept well known to Jews of Jesus' day. It was regularly given expression in an Aramaic prayer, the *Kaddish*, which originated as a prayer said at the dismissal of people from synagogue services or from study of Torah at a school:

Magnified and sanctified be his great name in the world that he has created according to his will. May he establish his kingdom during your lifetime and during your days, and during the life of all the house of Israel, ever speedily and at a near time. And say, Amen.[18]

In Mark, Jesus begins his ministry with the proclamation, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).[19] And he taught his disciples to pray likewise: "Sanctified be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, as in heaven so also on earth" (Matthew 6:9–10; cf. Luke 11:2).[20] In accordance with Jewish eschatological hopes and an apocalyptic worldview, Jesus emphasized the imminence of the absolute rule of God, for which pious Jews of Jesus' day prayed. That's why he solemnly told the crowds who gathered around him, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power" (Mark 9:1).

Not all Jews of Jesus' day believed in the resurrection, however. One day, some Sadducees, who didn't believe in resurrection, taunted Jesus with a hypothetical case (Matthew 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:27–40). Moses had commanded that, in the case of a man who died childless, his brother should marry the widow (Deuteronomy 25:5). Suppose there were seven brothers who all died childless. In the

resurrection, whose wife would she be? Jesus' answer is simple: "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matthew 22:30).

Elsewhere, Jesus challenges his followers to live in the present as though the kingdom had already come. In the Sermon on the Mount, he explains that love for one's neighbor was a common enough command, but that his ethical norm was much stricter: People should even love their enemies (Matthew 5:43–47; Luke 6:27–28, 32–36). His teaching on marriage and divorce was also very strict: Divorce was forbidden (Matthew 5:27–32, 19:9; Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18).[21] When his disciples suggested that such a strict teaching would discourage people from getting married at all, Jesus replied,

> There are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.
>
> (Matthew 19:11)

While some people in the early Church took Jesus' saying literally,[22] we should understand it as a case of deliberate hyperbole, such as is found in other of his injunctions (see, for example, Matthew 5:27–30 on adultery: "... If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.").

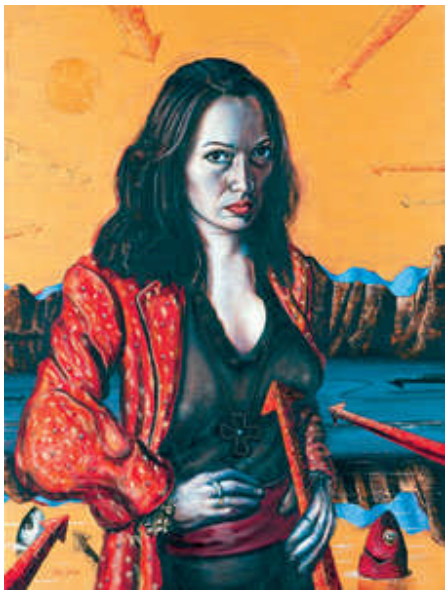
The point Jesus is making about the eunuch is that it is possible for a man to live on earth as he would in God's kingdom, where there is neither marriage nor procreation. Jesus is challenging people who are "able to receive it" to live a life of celibacy for the sake of the kingdom, and thus to live now as though the future kingdom had already come. It would be absurd to think that Jesus placed this challenge before others without accepting it for himself.

Was Jesus married? Despite what we might read in the popular press, we have no evidence in the New Testament or the apocryphal gospels that Jesus ever married. Further, Jesus' own teachings from his days as a prophet of the kingdom of God rule out the possibility that he could have been married to Mary Magdalene—or to any other woman—at that time.

From Saint to Sinner

By Birger A. Pearson

Sidebar to: Did Jesus Marry?



Private Collection / Bridgeman Art Library / Courtesy of IAP Fine Art

Dan Brown, William Phipps, Martin Scorsese—when looking for a lover or wife for Jesus, they all chose Mary Magdalene. It's not surprising. Mary Magdalene has long been recognized as one of the New Testament's more alluring women. Most people think of her as a prostitute who repented after encountering Jesus. In contemporary British artist Chris Gollon's painting of The Pre-penitent Magdalene (at right), Mary appears as a defiant femme fatal adorned with jewelry and make-up.

Yet, the New Testament says no such thing. Rather, in three of the four canonical Gospels, Mary Magdalene is mentioned by name only in connection with the death and resurrection of Jesus. She is a witness to his crucifixion (Matthew 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; John 19:25) and burial (Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47).[1] She is one of the first (the first, according to John) to arrive at the empty tomb (Matthew 28:1–8; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12; John 20:1–10). And she is one of the first (again, the first, according to John) to witness the risen Christ (Matthew 28:9; John 20:14–18).

Only the Gospel of Luke names Mary Magdalene in connection with Jesus' daily life and public ministry. There, Mary is listed as someone who followed Jesus as he went from village to village, bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. "And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had

been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means" (Luke 8:1–3).

The epithet "Magdalene," used in all the Gospels, indicates that Mary came from the mercantile town of Migdal (Taricheae) on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.[2] She must have been a woman of some means, if Luke's account can be trusted, for she helped provide Jesus and the twelve with material support. She had also experienced Jesus' healing power, presumably involving an exorcism of some sort.[3] It should be noted, though, that the author of the Gospel of Luke has a tendency to diminish Mary Magdalene's role, in comparison with her treatment in the other three canonical Gospels. For example, Luke is alone among the canonical Gospels in claiming that the risen Lord appeared exclusively to Peter (Luke 24:34; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:5). No appearance to Mary is recorded in Luke.[4] Accordingly, his reference to seven demons may be tendentious.[5]

So how did Mary become a repentant whore in Christian legend?

Critical scholarship has provided the answer to this question: It happened as a conscious attempt on the part of later interpreters of the Gospels to diminish her.[a] They did this by identifying her with other women mentioned in the Gospels, most notably the unnamed sinful woman who anoints Jesus' feet with ointment and whose sins he forgives (Luke 7:36–50) and the unnamed woman taken in adultery (John 7:53–8:11).[6] This conflation of texts was given sanction in the sixth century by Pope Gregory the Great (540–604) in a famous homily in which he holds Mary up as a model of penitence. Pope Gregory positively identified the unnamed anointer and adulteress as Mary, and suggested that the ointment used on Jesus' feet was once used to scent Mary's body. The seven demons Jesus cast out of Mary were, according to Gregory, the seven cardinal sins, which include lust. But, wrote Gregory, when Mary threw herself at Jesus' feet, "she turned the mass of her crimes to virtues, in order to serve God entirely in penance."[7]

Thus was invented the original hooker with a heart of gold.

Interestingly, the legend of Mary the penitent whore is found only in the Western church; in the Eastern church she is honored for what she was, a witness to the resurrection. Another Gregory, Gregory of Antioch (also sixth century), in one of his homilies, has Jesus say to the women at the tomb: "Proclaim to my disciples the mysteries which you have seen. Become the first teacher of the teachers. Peter, who has denied me, must learn that I can also choose women as apostles."[8]

Mary's historical role as an apostle is clearly tied to her experience of an appearance of the risen Christ. As noted above, in the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene goes alone to the tomb, where she is the first to see the risen Jesus. He tells her to tell his "brethren" that he is ascending to God the Father. She then goes to the disciples and tells them what she has seen and heard (John 20:1, 11–19).[9] Later that same day Jesus appears to the disciples gathered behind closed doors. He thus confirms in person the message Mary had given them. In contrast to Luke's picture of Mary, in John she emerges as an "apostle to the apostles."[10]

The positive role played by Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John was considerably enhanced in Christian circles that honored her memory. The Gospel of Mary, quoted in the accompanying article, is the product of one such early Christian community. In her recent book The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene, Jane Schaberg presents the following nine-point "profile" of Mary:

(1) Mary is prominent among the followers of Jesus; (2) she exists as a character, as a memory, in a textual world of androcentric language and patriarchal ideology; (3) she speaks boldly; (4) she plays a leadership role vis-à-vis the male disciples; (5) she is a visionary; (6) she is praised for her superior understanding; (7) she is identified as the intimate companion of Jesus; (8) she is opposed by or in open conflict with one or more of the male disciples; (9) she is defended by Jesus.[11]

All nine characteristics are prominent in the Gospel of Mary, although many of these nine points are found in other noncanonical texts.

But does this portrait of Mary Magdalene as an early Church leader reflect historical reality? Perhaps. One scholar has suggested that Mary may even be mentioned along with a few other female leaders whom Paul sends greetings to in Romans 16:6, where he writes: "Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you."[12] But this must remain speculative. It is true that we have no reason to suspect Mary was a prostitute or lover or wife of Jesus. But it is also true that if she was an apostle to the apostles, the evidence for her role has successfully been suppressed—at least until now. As a result of the recent work of a number of scholars, Mary Magdalene's apostolic role in early Christianity is getting a new hearing.

That, in my view, is more important than viewing her as Jesus' wife.

Was Jesus' Last Supper a Seder?

By Jonathan Klawans

Christie's Images/Superstock

With his disciples gathered around him, Jesus partakes of his Last Supper. The meal, in this late-15th-century painting (now in a private collection) by the Spanish artist known only as the Master of Perea, consists of lamb, unleavened bread and wine—all elements of the Seder feast celebrated on the first night of the Jewish Passover festival. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke appear to present Jesus' Last Supper as a Seder. In John, however, the seven-day Passover festival does not begin until after Jesus is crucified; thus, the Last Supper, which John never mentions, could not have been a Seder.

In the accompanying article, Jonathan Klawans suggests that the Passover Seder as we know it developed only after the time of Jesus, and after the Romans destroyed the Jerusalem Temple.

Many people assume that Jesus' Last Supper was a Seder, a ritual meal held in celebration of the Jewish holiday of Passover. And indeed, according to the Gospel of Mark 14:12, Jesus prepared for the Last Supper on the "first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb." If Jesus and his disciples gathered together to eat soon after the Passover lamb was sacrificed, what else could they possibly have eaten if not the Passover meal? And if they ate the Passover sacrifice, they must have held a Seder.

Three out of four of the canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) agree that the Last Supper was held only after the Jewish holiday had begun. Moreover, one of the best known and painstakingly detailed studies of the Last Supper—Joachim Jeremias's book *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*—lists no fewer than 14 distinct parallels between the Last Supper tradition and the Passover Seder.[1]

Photo by Rodger Ressmeyer, San Francisco/Corbis

A San Francisco seder. California Rabbi Jack Frankel and his family lift the first glass of wine during a Seder meal, held on the first night of Passover (and the second night in the Diaspora). The Seder commemorates the Exodus from Egypt. Throughout the meal, the biblical story is retold; the food is linked symbolically with the Exodus.

In front of each diner is a copy of the Haggadah, the book of prayers, hymns, biblical passages and rabbinic texts read aloud during the Seder. An elaborate, four-tiered Seder plate stands before the rabbi. The bottom three levels hold matzah (a fourth piece of matzah appears on a separate plate in the foreground), the unleavened bread that recalls the rapidity of the Israelites' flight from Egypt; they were in such a rush, Exodus 12:39 relates, they could not even wait for the dough to rise.

The top plate holds a roasted egg, which is variously interpreted as a symbol of life, spring, the circle of life, or sacrifice; a green vegetable (probably parsley), which represents the leaves used to spread blood on the doors' of the Israelites in Egypt; *charoset*, a mixture of apples and walnuts with wine and cinnamon, which recalls the mortar the Israelites used for building in Egypt; horseradish, which represents the bitterness of suffering in Egypt; and a lamb's shank bone, which represents the Passover sacrifice (see photo of sacrifice of the Passover lamb).

The Jewish holiday of Passover commemorates the Exodus from Egypt. The roots of the festival are found in Exodus 12, in which God instructs the Israelites to sacrifice a lamb at twilight on the 14th day of the Jewish month of Nisan, before the sun sets (Exodus 12:18). That night the Israelites are to eat the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The lamb's blood should be swabbed on their doorposts as a sign. God, seeing the sign, will then "pass over" the houses of the Israelites (Exodus 12:13), while smiting the Egyptians with the tenth plague, the killing of the first-born sons.

Exodus 12 commands the Israelites to repeat this practice every year, performing the sacrifice during the day and then consuming it after the sun has set. (According to Jewish tradition, the new day begins with the setting of the sun, so the sacrifice is made on the 14th but the beginning of Passover and the meal are actually on the 15th, although this sequence of dates is not specified in Exodus.) Exodus 12 further speaks of a seven-day festival, which begins when the sacrifice is consumed (Exodus 12:15).

Once the Israelites were settled in Israel, and once a Temple was built in Jerusalem, the original sacrifice described in Exodus 12 changed dramatically. Passover became one of the Jewish Pilgrimage festivals, and Israelites were expected to travel to Jerusalem to sacrifice a Passover lamb at the Temple during the afternoon of the 14th day, and then consume the Passover sacrifice once the sun had set, and

the festival had formally begun on the 15th. This kind of celebration is described as having taken place during the reigns of Kings Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Chronicles 30 and 35).

As time passed, the practice continued to evolve. Eventually, a number of customs, recorded in rabbinic literature, began to accumulate around the meal, which became so highly ritualized that it was called the *Seder*, from the Hebrew for "order": Unleavened bread was broken, wine was served, the diners reclined and hymns were sung. Furthermore, during the meal, the Exodus story was retold and the significance of the unleavened bread, bitter herbs and wine was explained.

David Harris

The sacrifice of the Passover lamb is conducted annually on Mt. Gerizim, in Nablus (ancient Shechem), in the West Bank, by the Samaritans, a religious group that split from Judaism by the second century B.C.E. The Samaritans retained the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) as their Scripture, although with some alterations. The Samaritan Bible refers to Mt. Gerizim, not Jerusalem, as the center of worship. The text also includes an 11th commandment in which the Israelites are instructed to build an altar on Mt. Gerizim.

In both Jewish and Samaritan traditions, the roots of the Passover sacrifice lie in Exodus 12, in which God instructs the Israelites in Egypt to sacrifice a lamb at twilight, before the sun sets. In the evening, the Israelites are to eat the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The lamb's blood should be swabbed on their doors: "For that night I [the Lord] will go through the land of Egypt and strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast…And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you: when I see the blood I will pass over you, so that no plagues will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

"This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord throughout the ages; you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread" (Exodus 12:12–15).

The bread and wine, the hymn, the reclining diners—many of these characteristic elements are shared by the Last Supper, as Jeremias pointed out. (Jeremias's 14 parallels are given in full in endnote

1.) What is more, just as Jews at the Seder discuss the symbolism of the Passover meal, Jesus at his Last Supper discussed the symbolism of the wine and bread in light of his own coming death.

It is not only Jeremias's long list of parallels that leads many modern Christians and Jews to describe the Last Supper as a Passover Seder. The recent popularity of interfaith Seders (where Christians and Jews celebrate aspects of Passover and the Last Supper together) points to an emotional impulse that is also at work here. The Christian celebration of the Eucharist (Communion)—the Last Supper—is the fundamental ritual for many Christians. And among Jews the Passover Seder is one of the most widely practiced of all observances. In these times of ecumenicism and general good feeling between Christians and Jews, many people seem to find it reassuring to think that Communion (the Eucharist) and the Passover Seder are historically related.

History, however, is often more complex and perhaps a little less comforting than we might hope. Although I welcome the current ecumenical climate, I believe we must be careful not to let our emotions get the better of us when we are searching for history. Indeed, even though the association of the Last Supper with a Passover Seder remains entrenched in the popular mind, a growing number of scholars are beginning to express serious doubts about this claim.

Of course a number of New Testament scholars—the Jesus Seminar comes to mind—tend to doubt that the Gospels accurately record very much at all about Jesus, with the exception of some of his sayings. Obviously if the Gospels cannot be trusted, then we have no reason to assume that there ever was a Last Supper at all. And if there was no Last Supper, then it could not have taken place on Passover.[2]

Furthermore, several Judaic studies scholars—Jacob Neusner is a leading example—very much doubt that rabbinic texts can be used in historical reconstructions of the time of Jesus. But rabbinic literature is our main source of information about what Jews might have done during their Seder meal in ancient times. For reasons that are not entirely clear, other ancient Jewish sources, such as Josephus and Philo, focus on what Jews did in the Temple when the Passover sacrifice was offered, rather than on what they did afterward, when they actually ate the sacrifice. Again, if we cannot know how Jews celebrated Passover at the time of Jesus, then we have to plead ignorance, and we would therefore be unable to answer our question.

There is something to be said for these skeptical positions, but I am not such a skeptic. I want to operate here under the opposite assumptions: that the Gospels can tell us about the historical Jesus,[3] and that rabbinic sources can be used—with caution—to reconstruct what Jews at the time of Jesus might have believed and practiced.[4] Even so, I do not think the Last Supper was a Passover Seder.

While three of the four canonical Gospels strongly suggest that the Last Supper did occur on Passover, we should not get too comfortable based on that. The three Gospels that support this view are the three *synoptic* Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke. As anyone who has studied these three Gospels knows, they are closely related. In fact, the name *synoptic* refers to the fact that these three texts can be studied most effectively when "seen together" (as implied in the Greek etymology of *synoptic*). Thus, in fact we don't really have three independent sources here at all. What we have, rather, is one testimony (probably Mark), which was then copied twice (by Matthew and Luke).

Against the "single" testimony of the synoptics that the Last Supper was a Passover meal stands the lone Gospel of John, which dates the crucifixion to the "day of Preparation for the Passover" (John 19:14). According to John, Jesus died just when the Passover sacrifice was being offered and before the festival began at sundown (see the sidebar to this article). Any last meal—which John does not record—would have taken place the night before, or even earlier than that. But it certainly could not have been a Passover meal, for Jesus died before the holiday had formally begun.

So are we to follow John or the synoptics?[5] There are a number of problems with the synoptic account. First, if the Last Supper had been a Seder held on the first night of Passover, then that would mean Jesus' trial and crucifixion took place during the week-long holiday. If indeed Jewish authorities were at all involved in Jesus' trial and death, then according to the synoptics those authorities would have engaged in activities—holding trials and carrying out executions—that were either forbidden or certainly unseemly to perform on the holiday. This is not the place to consider whether Jewish authorities were involved in Jesus' death.[6] Nor is it the place to consider whether such authorities would have been devout practitioners of Jewish law. But this is the place to point out that if ancient Jewish authorities had been involved in something that could possibly be construed as a violation of Jewish law, the Gospels—with their hatred of the Jewish authorities—would probably have made the most of it. The synoptic account stretches credulity, not just because it depicts something unlikely, but because it fails to recognize the unlikely and problematic nature of what it depicts. It is almost as if the synoptic tradition has lost all familiarity with contemporary Jewish practice. And if they have lost familiarity with that, they have probably lost familiarity with reliable historical information as well.

There are, of course, some reasons to doubt John's account too. He may well have had theological motivations for claiming that Jesus was executed on the day of preparation when the Passover sacrifice was being offered but before Passover began at sundown. John's timing of events supports the Christian claim that Jesus himself was a sacrifice and that his death heralds a new redemption, just as the Passover offering recalls an old one. Even so, John's claim that Jesus was killed just before Passover began is more plausible than the synoptics' claim that Jesus was killed on Passover. And if Jesus wasn't

killed on Passover, but before it (as John claims), then the Last Supper could not in fact have been a Passover Seder.

What then of Jeremias's long list of parallels? It turns out that under greater scrutiny the parallels are too general to be decisive. That Jesus ate a meal in Jerusalem, at night, with his disciples is not so surprising. It is also no great coincidence that during this meal the disciples reclined, ate both bread and wine, and sang a hymn. While such behavior may have been characteristic of the Passover meal, it is equally characteristic of practically any Jewish meal.

A number of scholars now believe that the ritual context for the Last Supper was not a Seder but a standard Jewish meal. That Christians celebrated the Eucharist on a daily or weekly basis (see Acts 2:46–47) underscores the fact that it was not viewed exclusively in a Passover context (otherwise, it would have been performed, like the Passover meal, on an annual basis).

An ancient Christian church manual called the Didache also suggests that the Last Supper may have been an ordinary Jewish meal. In Chapters 9 and 10 of the Didache, the eucharistic prayers are remarkably close to the Jewish Grace After Meals (*Birkat ha-Mazon*).[7] While these prayers are recited after the Passover meal, they would in fact be recited at any meal at which bread was eaten, holiday or not. Thus, this too underscores the likelihood that the Last Supper was an everyday Jewish meal.

Moreover, while the narrative in the synoptics situates the Last Supper during Passover, the fact remains that the only foods we are told the disciples ate are bread and wine—the basic elements of any formal Jewish meal. If this was a Passover meal, where is the Passover lamb? Where are the bitter herbs? Where are the four cups of wine?[a]

We are left with only one important parallel (Jeremias's 14th) that can be explained in terms of a Seder: the surprising fact that Jesus at his Last Supper engaged in symbolic explanation of the bread and wine, just as Jews at the Seder engage in symbolic explanations, interpreting aspects of the Passover meal in light of the Exodus from Egypt: "Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant'" (Matthew 26:26–28=Mark 14:22; see also Luke 22:19–20). Is this not a striking parallel to the ways in which Jews celebrating the Seder interpret, for example, the bitter herbs eaten with the Passover sacrifice as representing the bitter life the Israelites experienced as slaves in Egypt?

However, this last parallel between the Last Supper and the Passover Seder assumes that the Seder ritual we know today was celebrated in Jesus' day. But this is hardly the case.

When Jews today sit down to celebrate the Passover Seder, they use a book known as the Haggadah. The Hebrew word *haggadah* literally means "telling"; the title refers to the book's purpose: to provide the ordered framework through which the story of Passover is told at the Seder. Telling the story of Passover is, of course, one of the fundamental purposes of the celebration, as stated in Exodus 13:8: "And you shall tell your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went forth from Egypt.'"

From the Raban Haggadah/Courtesy of Mali Doron

"He went down to Egypt—impelled by God's word." Thus begins the Hebrew text on this page from an illuminated Haggadah created by Zeev Raban (1890–1970), a leader of Israel's Zionist Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts. The frieze-like imagery at top depicts the Exodus. At left Jacob wrestles with the angel; at right he dreams of a stairway to heaven.

The name *Haggadah*, from the Hebrew for "telling," refers to the retelling of the Exodus story at Passover. The book includes biblical quotations, rabbinic commentary, songs and prayers, and detailed instructions on how to conduct a Seder.

The text on this particular page provides rabbinic commentary on a biblical passage relating to Israel's sojourn in Egypt. After discussing Jacob's journey to Egypt, the text continues, "'And he lived there'—this teaches that our father Jacob did not go to Egypt to settle there permanently, just temporarily, as it is written: 'And the sons of Jacob said to Pharaoh: "We have come to live in this land temporarily, for there is no pasture for the flocks that belong to your servants, for the famine is harsh in the land of Canaan"'" (quoting Genesis 47:4).

The traditional text of the Haggadah as it exists today incorporates a variety of material, starting with the Bible, and running through medieval songs and poems. For many Jews (especially non-Orthodox Jews), the process of development continues, and many modern editions of the Haggadah contain contemporary readings of one sort or another. Even many traditional Jews have, for instance, adapted the Haggadah so that mention can be made of the Holocaust.[8]

How much of the Haggadah goes back to ancient times? In the 1930s and 1940s, the American Talmud scholar Louis Finkelstein (1895–1991) famously claimed that various parts of the Passover Haggadah were very early, stemming in part from the third century B.C.E.[9] In 1960, Israeli scholar Daniel Goldschmidt (1895–1972) effectively rebutted practically all of Finkelstein's claims. It is unfortunate that Goldschmidt's Hebrew article has not been translated, because it remains, to my mind, the classic work on the early history of the Passover Haggadah.[10] Fortunately, a number of brief and up-to-date treatments of the history of the Haggadah are now available.[11] A full generation later, the Goldschmidt-Finkelstein debate seems to have been settled, and in Goldschmidt's favor. Almost everyone doing serious work on the early history of Passover traditions, including Joseph Tabory, Israel Yuval, Lawrence Hoffman, and the father-son team of Shmuel and Ze'ev Safrai, has rejected Finkelstein's claims for the great antiquity of the bulk of the Passover Haggadah. What is particularly significant about this consensus is that these scholars are not radical skeptics. These scholars believe that, generally speaking, we can extract historically reliable information from rabbinic sources. But as demonstrated by the late Baruch Bokser in his book *The Origins of the Seder*, practically everything preserved in the early rabbinic traditions concerning the Passover Seder brings us back to the time immediately following the Roman destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E.[12] It's not that rabbinic literature cannot be trusted to tell us about history in the first century of the Common Era. It's that rabbinic literature—in the case of the Seder—does not even claim to be telling us how the Seder was performed before the destruction of the Temple.[b]

Let me elaborate on this proposition by examining the Haggadah's requirement of explaining the Passover symbols:

Rabban Gamaliel used to say: Whoever does not make mention of the following three things on Passover has not fulfilled his obligation: namely, the Passover sacrifice, unleavened bread (*matzah*) and bitter herbs.

(1) The Passover sacrifice, which our ancestors used to eat at the time when the Holy Temple stood—what is the reason? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt. As it is said, "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover…" (Exodus 12:27).

(2) The unleavened bread, which we eat—what is the reason? Because the dough of our ancestors had not yet leavened when the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed be He revealed Himself to them and redeemed them. As it is said, "And they baked unleavened cakes…" (Exodus 12:39).

(3) These bitter herbs, which we eat—what is the reason? Because the Egyptians made the lives of our ancestors bitter in Egypt. As it is said, "And they made their lives bitter…" (Exodus 1:14).

Sarajevo National Museum

Rabban Gamaliel, master of the rabbinic academy, instructs his students in this illumination from the Sarajevo Haggadah. The Haggadah credits Gamaliel with introducing the requirement that the symbolic significance of the food served during the Seder be explained during the meal. Some scholars who assume the Last Supper was a Seder have suggested that Jesus deliberately explained the significance of the bread and wine in fulfillment of this requirement.

But the requirement may not have even been in place in the time of Jesus. There were two leaders of the rabbinic academy called Gamaliel: One lived around the time of Jesus; the other, after the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E. The Gamaliel of the Haggadah appears to be the latter figure, for he talks about the time when the Temple stood in the past tense. If this latter Gamaliel instituted the Seder meal requirements, then Jesus' symbolic explanation of the bread and wine cannot be connected with them.

Produced in Spain in the 14th century, the Sarajevo Haggadah was brought to Italy after the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492. The manuscript had traveled to Sarajevo by 1894, when a young Jewish boy brought it with him to school. His father had died, leaving the family destitute, and he hoped to sell the manuscript. It was purchased by the Sarajevo National Museum. During World War II, when the Nazis demanded the manuscript be turned over to them, the museum's Muslim curator secretly passed the manuscript to a local Muslim preacher, who stashed it under the doorstep of a village mosque until the war ended. When civil war broke out in Sarajevo in 1992, the manuscript was again hidden away, in a vault beneath the National Bank. It remains there today, awaiting the rebuilding of the Sarajevo National Museum.

On first reading, Jeremias might appear to be correct: Jesus' explanation of the bread and the wine does seem similar to Rabban Gamaliel's explanation of the Passover symbols. Might not Jesus be presenting a competing interpretation of these symbols? Possibly. But it really depends on when this Rabban Gamaliel lived. If he lived later than Jesus, then it would make no sense to view Jesus' words as based on Rabban Gamaliel's.

Unfortunately for the contemporary historian, there were two rabbis named Gamaliel, both of whom bore the title "rabban" (which means "our master" and was usually applied to the head of the rabbinic academy). The first lived decades before the destruction of the Temple, according to rabbinic tradition.[13] It is this Gamaliel who is referred to in Acts 22:3, in which Paul is said to have claimed that he was

educated "at the feet of Gamaliel." The second Rabban Gamaliel was, according to rabbinic tradition, the grandson of the elder Gamaliel. This Gamaliel served as head of the rabbinic academy sometime after the destruction of the Temple. Virtually all scholars working today believe that the Haggadah tradition attributing the words quoted above to Gamaliel refers to the grandson, Rabban Gamaliel the Younger, who lived long after Jesus had died.[14] One piece of evidence for this appears in the text quoted above, in which Rabban Gamaliel is said to have spoken of the time "when the Temple was still standing"—as if that time had already passed. Furthermore, as Baruch Bokser has shown, the bulk of early rabbinic material pertaining to the Passover Haggadah is attributed in the Haggadah itself to figures who lived immediately following the destruction of the Temple (and were therefore contemporaries of Gamaliel the Younger). Finally, a tradition preserved in the Tosefta (a rabbinic companion volume to the earliest rabbinic lawbook, the Mishnah, edited perhaps in the third or fourth century) suggests that Gamaliel the Younger played some role in Passover celebrations soon after the Temple was destroyed, when animal sacrifices could for this reason no longer be offered.[15]

Thus, the Passover Seder as we know it developed after 70 C.E. I wish we could know more about how the Passover meal was celebrated before the Temple was destroyed. But unfortunately, our sources do not answer this question with any certainty. Presumably, Jesus and his disciples would have visited the Temple to slaughter their Passover sacrifice. Then they would have consumed it along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, as required by the Book of Exodus. And presumably they would have engaged in conversation pertinent to the occasion. But we cannot know for sure.

Having determined that the Last Supper was not a Seder and that it probably did not take place on Passover, I must try to account for why the synoptic Gospels portray the Last Supper as a Passover meal. Of course, the temporal proximity of Jesus' crucifixion (and with it, the Last Supper) to the Jewish Passover provides one motive: Surely this historical coincidence could not be dismissed as just that.

Another motive relates to a rather practical question: Within a few years after Jesus' death, Christian communities (which at first consisted primarily of Jews) began to ask when, how and even whether they should celebrate or commemorate the Jewish Passover.[16] This was a question not only early on, but throughout the time of the so-called Quartodeciman controversy. The Quartodecimans (the 14-ers) were Christians who believed that the date of Easter should be calculated so as to coincide with the Jewish celebration of Passover, whether or not that date fell on a Sunday. The Jewish calendar was (and is) lunar, and therefore there is always a full moon on the night of the Passover Seder, that is, the night following the 14th of Nisan. But that night is not always a Saturday night. The Quartodeciman custom of celebrating Easter beginning on the evening following the 14th day apparently began relatively early in Christian history and persisted at least into the fifth century C.E. The alternate view—that Easter must be on a Sunday, regardless of the day on which the Jewish Passover falls—ultimately prevailed. Possibly the

Gospels' disagreements about the timing of the Last Supper were the result of these early Christian disputes about when Easter should be celebrated. After all, if you wanted to encourage Christians to celebrate Easter on Passover, would it not make sense to emphasize the fact that Jesus celebrated Passover with his disciples just before he died?

Related to the question of when Christians should recall Jesus' last days was a question of how they should be recalled. Early on, a number of Christians—Quartodecimans and others—felt that the appropriate way to mark the Jewish Passover was not with celebration, but with fasting. On the one hand, this custom reflected an ancient Jewish tradition of fasting during the time immediately preceding the Passover meal (as related in *Mishnah Pesachim* 10:1). On the other hand, distinctively Christian motives for this fast can also be identified, from recalling Jesus' suffering on the cross to praying for the eventual conversion of the Jews.[17]

The German New Testament scholar Karl Georg Kuhn has argued that the Gospel of Luke places the Last Supper in a Passover context in order to convince Christians not to celebrate Passover. He notes that the synoptic Last Supper tradition attributes to Jesus a rather curious statement of abstinence: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Paschal lamb with you before I suffer, for I tell you that I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God…[and] I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:15–18; cf. Mark 14:25 ["I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God"]=Matthew 26:29). The synoptics' placement of the Last Supper in a Passover context should be read along with Jesus' statement on abstinence; in this view, the tradition that the Last Supper was a Passover meal argues that Christians should mark the Passover not by celebrating, but by fasting, because Jesus has already celebrated his last Passover.[18] Thus, until Jesus' kingdom is fulfilled, Christians should not celebrate at all during Passover.

New Testament scholar Bruce Chilton recently presented an alternate theory. He argues that the identification of the Last Supper with a Passover Seder originated among Jewish Christians who were attempting to maintain the Jewish character of early Easter celebrations.[19] By calling the Last Supper a Passover meal, these Jewish-Christians were trying to limit Christian practice in three ways. Like the Passover sacrifice, the recollection of the Last Supper could only be celebrated in Jerusalem, at Passover time, and by Jews.[c]

Without deciding between these two contradictory alternatives (though Kuhn's is in my mind more convincing), we can at least agree that there are various reasons why the early church would have tried to "Passoverize" the Last Supper tradition.[20]Placing the Last Supper in the context of Passover was a literary tool in early Christian debates about whether or not and how Christians should celebrate Passover.

Other examples of Passoverization can be identified. The Gospel of John, as previously noted, and Paul (1 Corinthians 5:7–8) equate Jesus' crucifixion with the Passover sacrifice: "Our Paschal lamb, Christ has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." This too is a Passoverization of the Jesus tradition, but it is one that contradicts the identification of the Last Supper with the Seder or Passover meal.

Both of these Passoverizations can be placed in the broader context of Exodus typology in general. W.D. Davies and N.T. Wright have argued that various New Testament sources depict the events of Jesus' life as a new Exodus. Early Christians interpreted Jesus' life and death in light of the ancient Jewish narrative of redemption par excellence, the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Surely the depiction of the Last Supper as a Passover observance could play a part in this larger effort of arguing that Jesus' death echoes the Exodus from Egypt.[21]

This process of Passoverization did not end with the New Testament. The second-century bishop Melito of Sardis (in Asia Minor) once delivered a widely popular Paschal sermon, which could well be called a "Christian Haggadah," reflecting at great length on the various connections between the Exodus story and the life of Jesus.[22]

Passoverization can even be found in the Middle Ages. Contrary to popular belief, the Catholic custom of using unleavened wafers in the Mass is medieval in origin. The Orthodox churches preserve the earlier custom of using leavened bread.[23] Is it not possible to see the switch from using leavened to unleavened bread as a "Passoverization" of sorts?

Was the Last Supper a Passover Seder? Most likely, it was not.

When Passover Begins: The Synoptics versus John

Sidebar to: Was Jesus' Last Supper a Seder?

	14th of Nisan (Ending at Sundown)	15th of Nisan (Beginning at Sundown)
	Day of Preparation for Passover. Passover lamb sacrificed in late afternoon.	Passover holiday begins and a festive Seder meal is held at night. Passover lamb is consumed.
Matthew 26–27, Mark 14–15 and Luke 22–23	Jesus and his disciples prepare for Passover.	Jesus and his disciples hold a Last Supper at the time of the Passover Seder. Jesus is arrested that night. He is killed the next morning, which is the day of the 15th of Nisan.
John 19	Jesus crucified while the Passover lambs are being sacrificed. (The Last Supper is not mentioned by John, but it would have taken place the night before the crucifixion or even earlier.)	

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Notes

Did Jesus Exist? Searching for Evidence Beyond the Bible

Originally published in the January/February 2015 issue of Biblical Archaeology Review

a. Lawrence Mykytiuk, "Archaeology Confirms 50 Real People in the Bible," **BAR** 40:02.

b. See biblicalarchaeology.org/50.

c. John P. Meier, "The Testimonium," *Bible Review* 07:03.

d. See André Lemaire, "Burial Box of James the Brother of Jesus," **BAR** 28:06; Hershel Shanks, "'Brother of Jesus' Inscription Is Authentic!" **BAR** 38:04.

For extensive endnotes, visit biblicalarchaeology.org/didjesusexist.

Jesus' Birthplace and Jesus' Home

Originally published in the November/December 2014 issue of Biblical Archaeology Review

a. See Steve Mason, "Where Was Jesus Born? O Little Town of … Nazareth?" *Bible Review* 16:01.
b. See Morten Hørning Jensen, "Antipas—The Herod Jesus Knew," **BAR** 38:05; Mark Chancey, "How Jewish Was Jesus' Galilee?" **BAR** 33:04; Mark Chancey and Eric M. Meyers, "Spotlight on Sepphoris: How Jewish Was Sepphoris in Jesus' Time?" **BAR** 26:04; Richard A. Batey, "Sepphoris—An Urban Portrait of Jesus," **BAR** 18:03.

Has Jesus' Nazareth House Been Found?

Originally published in the March/April 2015 issue of Biblical Archaeology Review

a. Eric M. Meyers, "The Pools of Sepphoris: Ritual Baths or Bathtubs? Yes, They Are," **BAR**, 26:04; Mark Chancey and Eric M. Meyers, "Spotlight on Sepphoris: How Jewish Was Sepphoris in Jesus' Time?" **BAR** 26:04; Zeev Weiss, "The Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic," **BAR** 26:05.

1. The Nazareth Archaeological Project is a British archaeological project, sponsored by the Palestine Exploration Fund and the Late Antiquity Research Group. The project is directed by the author.
2. D. Adan-Bayewitz, "On the Chronology of the Common Pottery of Northern Roman Judaea/Palestine," in G.C. Bottini, L. di Segni and L.D. Chrupcala, eds., *One Land—Many Cultures: Archaeological Studies in Honour of Stanislao Loffreda OFM* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2003).
3. For further details, see Ken Dark, "Early Roman-Period Nazareth and the Sisters of Nazareth Convent," *The Antiquaries Journa*l 92 (2012), p. 1.
4. Y. Alexandre, *Mary's Well, Nazareth: The Late Hellenistic to the Ottoman Periods* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority Report 49, 2012).
5. G. Schumacher, "Recent Discoveries in Galilee,'' *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* 21 (1889), p. 68.
6. The present Franciscan Church of St. Joseph (the "Church of St. Joseph's Workshop'') within the Church of the Annunciation compound is a Crusader foundation with no evidence of an earlier church on its site.

Did Jesus Marry?

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a. Gnostic Christianity teaches that knowledge, rather than faith or observance, is the basis for salvation. "Knowledge" in this tradition is basically knowledge of the human self as divine, and salvation involves the soul's escape from the body and its return to its transcendent origins. This teaching is rejected in the later writings of the New Testament (1 Timothy 6:20–21). Valentinus, who taught in Alexandria and Rome, was the greatest of the second-century Gnostic Christian teachers. The Valentinian "heresy" persisted into the seventh century.

1. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code: A Novel* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).
2. William E. Phipps, *Was Jesus Married? The Distortion of Sexuality in the Christian Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970; repr. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986).
3. Phipps, *Was Jesus Married?* p. 67.
4. Phipps, *The Sexuality of Jesus* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1996), pp. 122–142, 174.
5. The *Gospel of Philip* is the third tractate in Nag Hammadi Codex II (hereafter, NHC II), and the *Gospel of Mary* is the first tractate in the closely related Berlin Gnostic Codex (BG). See James M. Robinson and Richard Smith, eds., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3rd rev. ed. (Leiden: E.J. Brill; New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 139–160 and 523–527 respectively. The translations given here are from that volume. The translations given in Dan Brown's novel are rather free.
6. Phipps (*Sexuality*, p. 137, cf. p. 173) also suggests that the *Gospel of Philip* may preserve authentic tradition to that effect.
7. NHC II 63, 33–64, 5.
8. Angular brackets indicate an emendation to the text. Here the manuscript reads "her," but one should emend the text to read "his." Otherwise the second Mary would be Jesus' aunt.
9. NHC II 59, 6–11.
10. For an excellent discussion see Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).
11. The Coptic language, the latest form of the language of the pharaohs, is written in a modified Greek alphabet and has incorporated into its vocabulary numerous Greek words.
12. In the *Second Apocalypse of James* (NHC V,4), Jesus kisses his brother James on the mouth (56, 14–15). It would be absurd to conclude from this that Jesus was a bisexual.
13. NHC II 64, 5–9.
14. For a recent translation, with extensive discussion, see Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2003).
15. Mary is the only follower of Jesus named in the Gospel of Mary, and it should be noted that she is simply called Mary—not Mary Magdalene. It is usually taken for granted that Mary Magdalene is meant, but that is by no means certain. Although I continue to be persuaded by this majority opinion, Stephen J. Shoemaker ("Rethinking the 'Gnostic Mary': Mary of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala in Early Christian Tradition," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 [2001], pp. 555–595, esp. 581–589) has made a strong case for identifying the Mary of the gospel with Jesus' mother, Mary of Nazareth, rather than Mary Magdalene.
16. BG 17, 16–18, 15.
17. BG 10, 1–6.
18. Translation (slightly modified) in Abraham E. Millgram, *Jewish Worship* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1971), p. 154. Nowadays the *Kaddish* is normally used in connection with intercession on behalf of a deceased person.
19. New Testament quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise specified.
20. My translation. There can be no question that Jesus modeled his own prayer ("the Lord's Prayer") on the *Kaddish*.
21. The prohibition is absolute in Mark and Luke, while Matthew adds a loophole: "except for unchastity." Matthew's version is probably secondary, and reflects the Pharisaic teaching of the "School of Shammai."
22. For example, Origen, a third-century Alexandrian.

Sidebar: "From Saint to Sinner"

a. See Jane Schaberg, "How Mary Magdalene Became a Whore," **BR**, October 1992.

1. Luke 23:55 refers to "the women who had come with him from Galilee" without naming any of them.
2. On that town, see esp. Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 47–64.
3. Reference to seven demons may mean that she was totally possessed. On the seven demons see Esther de Boer, *Mary Magdalene: Beyond the Myth* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 48–55.
4. See esp. Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 19–40.
5. In a secondary ending to the Gospel of Mark, it is said that Jesus "appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons" (Mark 16:9). The secondary ending is probably dependent upon the Gospel of Luke. As the best manuscripts attest, the earliest versions of Mark end at 16:8.
6. Mel Gibson makes that identification in his movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. On the tendentious conflation of traditions, see esp. Schaberg, *Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, pp. 65–77, 82.
7. Quoted in Schaberg, *Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, p. 82.
8. Quoted in de Boer, *Mary Magdalene*, p. 12.
9. Vv. 2–10 are probably a later interpolation into a more original account and interrupt the flow of the narrative.
10. On this term see Brock, *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle*, p. 1. Brock's book is a valuable discussion of the apostolate in early Christianity and Mary's role in it.
11. Schaberg, *Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, p. 129.
12. de Boer, *Mary Magdalene*, pp. 59–60.

Was Jesus' Last Supper a Seder?

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a. Some may also ask, where is the *unleavened* bread? The Gospels do not specify that Jesus fed his disciples unleavened bread, which is what Jews would eat at Passover. This however does not preclude the possibility that Jesus used unleavened bread at the Last Supper, as Jews commonly refer to unleavened bread (called in Hebrew, *matzah*) as simply "bread." See, for example, Deuteronomy 16:3 and Nahum N. Glatzer, *The Passover Haggadah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), pp. 24, 64.
b. See Baruch Bokser, "Was the Last Supper a Passover Seder?" **BR** 03:02.
c. See Bruce Chilton, "The Eucharist—Exploring Its Origins," **BR** 10:06.

1. The book first appeared in 1935 and was revised and translated various times after that. The 14 parallels are listed in the 1960 third edition, which was translated into English in 1966. See Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 3rd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1966), esp. pp. 42–61. His 14 parallels may be summarized as follows: (1) The Last Supper took place in Jerusalem, (2) in a room made available to pilgrims for that purpose, and (3) it was held during the night. (4) Jesus celebrated that meal with his "family" of disciples; and (5) while they ate, they reclined. (6) This meal was eaten in a state of ritual purity. (7) Bread was broken during the meal and not just at the beginning. (8) Wine was consumed and (9) this wine was red. (10) There were last-minute preparations for the meal, after which (11) alms were given, and (12) a hymn was sung. (13) Jesus and his disciples then remained in Jerusalem. Finally, (14) Jesus discussed the symbolic significance of the meal, just as Jews do during the Passover Seder. For brief surveys summarizing the question see Robert F. O'Toole, "Last Supper," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 4, pp. 235–236 and Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 423–427.

2. For a representative statement denying the historicity of the Last Supper traditions, see Robert W. Funk and The Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), p. 139.
3. For an excellent treatment of what we can and cannot know of the historical Jesus, see the recent book by my colleague Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth*, *King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999).
4. For an excellent summary of Judaism in Jesus' time—one which makes judicious use of rabbinic evidence—see E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 B.C.E.–66 C.E.* (London: SCM Press, 1992). For more on the use of rabbinic sources, see Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), esp. pp. 59–84.
5. There are those who attempt to harmonize John and the synoptics by supposing that they disagreed not about when the Last Supper occurred, but about whether the date of Passover was supposed to be calculated by following a solar calendar or a lunar one. Annie Jaubert presents this theory in her book, *The Date of the Last Supper* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1965). This view cannot be accepted, however. It is too difficult to conceive of Passover having been celebrated twice in the same place without any contemporary or even later writer referring to such an event. Surely it would have been remarkable if two Passovers were held in the same week! Moreover, while we do know of solar calendars from the Book of Jubilees and the Temple Scroll, we do not know how any of these calendars really worked. Jubilees's calendar, for instance, explicitly prohibits any form of intercalation (the adding of extra days in a leap year). And without intercalation, by Jesus' time, Jubilees's 364-day solar calendar would be off not just by days, but by months. It is only by hypothesizing some manner of intercalation that we can even come up with the possibility that in Jesus' time the two calendars were both functioning, but off by just a few days. Thus in the end, Jaubert's book presents a good theory, but it remains just that, a theory. For more on these questions, see James C. VanderKam, *Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Measuring Time* (London: Routledge, 1998).
6. On the question of Jewish authorities and their role in Jesus' death, see John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).
7. For more on the parallels between the Didache and the Jewish *Birkat ha-Mazon*, see Enrico Mazza, *The Celebration of the Eucharist: The Origin of the Rite and the Development of Its Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), esp. pp. 19–26 (where he discusses these parallels) and pp. 307–309 (where he provides translations of the texts).
8. A useful version of the traditional text of the Haggadah, with introduction and translation, can be found in the widely available edition of Nahum N. Glatzer, *The Passover Haggadah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981). Those interested in appreciating how the Haggadah brings together material from various historical periods might look at Jacob Freedman,*Polychrome Historical Haggadah for Passover* (Springfield, MA: Jacob Freedman Liturgy Research Foundation, 1974).
9. Finkelstein published his theories in three articles: "The Oldest Midrash: Pre-Rabbinic Ideals and Teachings in the Passover Haggadah," *Harvard Theological Review* (*HTR*) 31 (1938), pp. 291–317; "Pre-Maccabean Documents in the Passover Haggadah (Part 1)," *HTR* 35 (1942), pp. 291–332; and "Pre-Maccabean Documents in the Passover Haggadah (Part 2)," *HTR* 36 (1943), pp. 1–38. Glatzer summarizes some of Finkelstein's claims in *The Passover Haggadah*, pp. 39–42.
10. Goldschmidt, *The Passover Haggadah: Its Sources and History* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1960). Glatzer's edition of the Haggadah (cited above) is based in part on Goldschmidt's research, but the first edition of Glatzer's Haggadah was published in 1953, years before Goldschmidt's final 1960 version of his article.
11. See especially the collection of essays, *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1999). Those who read Hebrew will want to consult Shmuel Safrai and Ze'ev Safrai, *Haggadah of the Sages: The Passover Haggadah* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Carta, 1998).
12. Baruch Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984).
13. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Sabbath*, 15a.
14. This view can be traced back well into the middle ages—it is advocated in a 14th-century Haggadah commentary by Rabbi Simeon ben Zemach Duran. This view has also been advocated more recently by, among others, Daniel Goldschmidt, Joseph Tabory, Israel Yuval and Baruch Bokser. Bokser, *Origins of the Seder*, pp. 41–43, 79–80, and 119 n. 13; Goldschmidt, *Passover Haggadah*, pp. 51–53. See also the articles by Joseph Tabory and Israel Yuval in *Passover and Easter*, esp. pp. 68–69 (Tabory) and pp. 106–107 (Yuval). Goldschmidt, Tabory and Yuval go even one step further, suggesting that Jeremias had it backwards. It

was not that Jesus was reinterpreting a prior Jewish tradition. Rather, Rabban Gamaliel the Younger required the explanation of the Passover symbols as a way of countering Christian manipulation of these symbols.

15. *Tosefta Pesahim* 10:12; see Bokser, *Origins of the Seder*, pp. 41–43, 79–80.

16. Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, pp. 66 and 122–125.

17. On the Quartodecimans and on fasting before Easter, see Bradshaw, "The Origins of Easter" in Bradshaw and Hoffman,*Passover and Easter*, pp. 81–97.

18. See Karl Georg Kuhn, "The Lord's Supper and the Communal Meal at Qumran," in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, Krister Stendahl, ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 65–93. Kuhn builds here on work of B. Lohse, published in German (and cited in his article). See also Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, pp. 216–218.

19. Bruce Chilton, *A Feast of Meanings: Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus Through Johannine Circles* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), esp. pp. 93–108.

20. The term "Passoverize" is used by Mazza, in his brief treatment of the issue; see *Celebration of the Eucharist*, pp. 24–26.

21. See especially W.D. Davies, *Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 25–92.

22. Commonly entitled "On the Passover," the sermon survives in numerous copies and fragments in Coptic, Greek, Syriac, Latin and Georgian. The oldest copy, from the third or early fourth century, is in Coptic. See James E. Goehring and William W. Willis, "*On the Passover* by Melito of Sardis," in *The Crosby-Schoyen Codex MS 193*, James E. Goehring, ed. (Leuven [Louvain]: Peeters, 1999).

23. On the medieval debate between the Catholic and Orthodox churches on this matter, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 2, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom* (600–1700) (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 177–178. On the archaeological evidence pertaining to this dispute, see George Galavaris, *Bread and the Liturgy: The Symbolism of Early Christian and Byzantine Bread Stamps* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1970).