

TIS The Independent Scholar

A peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal

www.ncis.org

ISSN 2381-2400

Volume 10 (December 2023)
SPECIAL ISSUE
Ancient Texts, Modern Perspectives



Editorial Board

Shelby Shapiro, Ph.D. (General Editor)

tis@ncis.org

Amanda Haste, Ph.D. (Humanities Editor)

amanda.haste@ncis.org

Joan Cunningham Ph.D. (STEM Editor)

jcunningham@ncis.org

Jordan Lavender, Ph.D.

jordan.lavender@ncis.org

Annie Rehill, Ph.D.

annie.rehill@ncis.org

OPEN  ACCESS



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



EDITORIAL BOARD

Joan Cunningham (Ph.D. Public Health: Epidemiology) is an epidemiologist, with BSc (biology) and MSc (Biology: aquatic eco-embryology) from the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada and Ph.D. from the University of Texas School of Public Health (Houston). Most of her career focused on cancer epidemiology, particularly racial disparities in breast cancer. Most recently, she served on the COVID-19 Data Team for Bexar County, Texas. Her current work concerns racial and ethnic disparities in COVID-19.

Amanda Haste (Ph.D. Musicology; Dip.Trans.) is an Anglo-French musicologist and academic translator whose research interests include identity construction through music and language. She is a member of the Chartered Institute of Linguists and taught in the Applied Languages and Music departments at Aix-Marseille University, France. Her books include *Constructing Identity in an Age of Globalization* (ed. with James Block) (Paris: Ex Modio, 2015) and *Music & Identity in Twenty-First-Century Monasticism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2023); she is currently co-editing (with Linda Baines) the *NCIS Guide for Independent Scholars* (forthcoming, January 2024). www.amandahaste.com

Jordan Lavender (Ph.D. Spanish Linguistics) taught Spanish and Latin American History at Pomfret School in Pomfret, CT and has conducted sociolinguistic research on the use of minority languages on Twitter in Spain, bilingualism in the linguistic landscapes of Azogues, Ecuador, forms of address in Ecuadorian Spanish, based on ethnographic research in both online and offline contexts, and linguistic considerations in early Biblical exegesis.

Annie Rehill (Ph.D. Modern French Studies, MFA; MLS) is a longtime editor and writer. Her academic research, focused on intercultural spaces and ecocritical concerns in French Canadian literature, led to articles (most recently "Taché's Voyageur Is Not Cooper's Frontiersman: Differences Between Canadian and U.S. Concepts of 'Frontier,'" *Comparative Literature Studies*, 2022), a book chapter, and a book. Her general-audience publications include the book *The Apocalypse Is Everywhere: A Popular History of America's Favorite Nightmare* and the creative nonfiction pieces "Assisting Science" (*Potomac Review*) and "The Drug Run" (*New Millennium Writings*). www.annierehill.com.

Shelby Shapiro (Ph.D. American Studies) served for many years as the English-language editor of *Tsum punk/To the Point*, the magazine of Yiddish of Greater Washington, as well as for its predecessor publication, and was Associate Editor of *Records of the State of Connecticut* from 2012 to 2021. His Ph.D. dissertation dealt with acculturation and American Jewish women in the Yiddish press; he is a Yiddish-English translator, and his research interests include Jazz and Blues (having presented jazz radio programs for nine years), the labor movement, the First World War, and immigrant anarchism.



NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

All members of NCIS and their affiliated Partner Group organizations are cordially invited to submit manuscripts to *The Independent Scholar* (TIS). We welcome submissions in the form of traditional essays as well as creative or artistic material on any topic that will appeal to our members. Your manuscript may be presented in the TIS house style and should be referenced according to APA style. It should conform to the academic standards demanded by NCIS and will be subjected to a robust peer review process. Please consult the [submission guidelines](#) before submitting material; queries should be sent to the General Editor at tis@ncis.org.

If you have a book you would like reviewed, or you would like to offer to review a book, please email the Book Review Editor on reviews@ncis.org. As a guide to length and content, you can download previous reviews from <https://www.ncis.org/book-reviews-the-independent-scholar-tis>.

About NCIS

The National Coalition of Independent Scholars is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation (est. 1989) which supports independent scholars worldwide and provides them with a valuable scholarly community.

NCIS represents independent scholars from every continent and in many disciplines in STEM and the Humanities. Its members include unaffiliated scholars, adjunct and part-time faculty, emeritus professors, graduate students, researchers, artists and curators. The benefits of membership are many, but the great benefit of joining NCIS is affiliation with an internationally recognized intellectual society.

Today, NCIS is an international organization whose members hail from many countries and pursue diverse fields of study in a variety of disciplines. This is the population NCIS proudly serves.

Member Benefits

NCIS MEMBERSHIP offers opportunities for grants and prizes, member discounts and academic support.

FREE MEMBER RESOURCES include a member profile page, an NCIS.org email address, and letters of introduction.

ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES & RESOURCES include publication in and/or peer reviewing for *The Independent Scholar*, book reviewing (or having your own academic book reviewed), free webinars and access to resources on academic skills such as presenting conference papers, chairing conference sessions, and publishing your work.

GRANT AWARDS for which members may apply include NCIS Conference Support Grants and Research Grants, David Soneis Award, Amanda Haste Award, and Special Research Support Grants (three awards p.a. for each of these) and the annual Elizabeth Eisenstein Essay Prize. More information on all these can be found at www.ncis.org/grants.

MEMBER DISCOUNTS are offered for JSTOR Journal Access, Nota Bene referencing software, and Professional Writing and Translation Services from NCIS members.

NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES include discussion groups on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, collegial support services, regional and online member gatherings, and international NCIS Conferences at major academic institutions.

www.ncis.org

Disclaimer Although the articles presented in *The Independent Scholar* have been subjected to a robust peer review process to ensure scholarly integrity, the views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the TIS editorial board or of NCIS.



The Independent Scholar

Volume 10 (December 2023)

SPECIAL ISSUE

Ancient Texts, Modern Perspectives

Contents

FROM THE EDITOR'S LAPTOP	1
CONTRIBUTORS	2
CRITICAL ESSAYS	4
Reading the Jefferson Bible: Elucidating the Ethics of Jesus of Nazareth	4
JAMES MAGRINI	
The Hebrew Gospel in the Hebrew Script: Fourth Century Interpretation of Ἑβραϊδι Διαλέκτω as Alphabet	25
JORDAN LAVENDER	
Where the Line is Drawn: Trauma and Narrative in the Histories of Agathias	48
KEENAN BACA-WINTERS	
Titus and Other Jesus Missionaries on Crete: Encountering the Legacy of the Goddess	64
VALERIE A. ABRAHAMSEN	
ELIZABETH EISENSTEIN ESSAY PRIZE 2022	79
Winner:	
U.S.-Peruvian Business Relations and Their Effects on the Pioneer Migration of Peruvians to Paterson, New Jersey 1920–1950. Published in <i>The Latin Americanist</i> , Volume 65, Number 2, June 2021, pp. 286-311. (Not reprinted here due to permission being denied.)	
GIANNCARLO MUSCHI	
Runner-up:	80
Protecting Foreigners: The Refugee Crisis on the Belize–Yucatán Border, 1847–71.	
First published in <i>Law and History Review</i> , February 2021, Vol. 39, No. 1 and reprinted in this issue.	
VANESSA MONGEY	



BOOK REVIEWS	98
<i>American Lucifers: The Dark History of Artificial Light 1750-1865</i>	98
Jeremy Zalle Reviewed by SHELBY SHAPIRO	
<i>Free Will and Human Life</i>	101
Alan E. Johnson Reviewed by GARY HERSTEIN	
<i>With Freedom in Our Ears: Histories of Jewish Anarchism</i>	105
Anna Elena Torres & Kenyon Zimmer (eds.) Reviewed by SHELBY SHAPIRO	
<i>Independent Scholars Meet the World</i>	108
Christine Caccipuoti & Elizabeth Keohane-Burbridge (eds.) Reviewed by AMANDA HASTE	
<i>Avian Illuminations: A Cultural History of Birds</i>	111
Boria Sax Reviewed by SHELBY SHAPIRO	
<i>A Boston Schooner in the Royal Navy, 1768-1722: Commerce and Conflict in Maritime British America.....</i>	113
Phillip Reid Reviewed by STANLEY D.M. CARPENTER	
<i>Madness and genetic determinism: Is mental illness in our genes?</i>	115
Patrick D. Hahn Reviewed by KEVIN HANS WAITKUWEIT	
OBITUARY	117
Joanne Lafler (1934-2023), a founding mother of NCIS	



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



FROM THE EDITOR'S LAPTOP

Welcome to this special issue Volume 10 of *The Independent Scholar* on the theme of "Ancient Texts, Modern Perspectives." The four critical essays apply new perspectives, methodologies and viewpoints to understand ancient writings and events. Chronologically by the antiquity of their sources, Dr. Keenan Baca-Winters examines the *Histories* of Agathias, a writer who chronicled the constant wars between the "civilized" Romans and the "barbarians" seeking to overthrow them. He is not concerned with Agathias's truth-claims, but rather with Agathias's emotional trauma as he processed these wars, battles, wins and losses.

Dr. Jordan Lavender examines the complex linguistic problems involved in reading but one of the Christian Gospels, noting the historical Jesus "was a multilingual person in a multilingual society." He considers the languages and dialectics at play, and employs different and new tools of linguistic analysis to make his points. In "Titus and Other Jesus Missionaries on Crete: Encountering the Legacy of the Goddess," Dr. Valerie Abrahamsen adds to her pioneering work on Goddess figures within early Christianity by examining Titus as an example of an early missionary of the Jesus movement. She argues that this can help us learn more about that movement on Crete, which was home to a peaceful goddess-centered civilization dating to the Neolithic era.

The essay by Dr. James Magrini studies the cut-and-paste Christian Bible assembled by Thomas Jefferson to arrive at Jefferson's version of Christian ethics in line with what Jefferson considered important enough to retain. One of Jefferson's methods was to remove all references to the supernatural, especially miracles. What, then, was the ethical program of a Deist?

Regretfully, we were unable to secure permission from *The Latin Americanist* to reprint the 2022 Eisenstein Prize-winning essay, Giancarlo Muschi's "U.S.-Peruvian Business Relations and Their Effects on the Pioneer Migration of Peruvians to Paterson, New Jersey 1920–1950," *The Latin Americanist* 65, no. 2 (June 2021): 286-311, but readers can go to the journal, or its link, *Project MUSE*, [doi:10.1353/tla.2021.0019](https://doi.org/10.1353/tla.2021.0019). We are however pleased to reprint the Eisenstein Prize Runner-up, Dr. Vanessa Mongey's "Protecting Foreigners: The Refugee Crisis on the Belize–Yucatán Border, 1847–71," which was first published in the *Law and History Review* 39, no. 1 (February 2021): 66-95. Our thanks to *Law and History Review* for permission to reprint.

As usual, we have an interesting assortment of book reviews that amply illustrate the wide-ranging interests of our membership. This volume exhibits once again the excitement of those involved in the world of Independent Scholarship. We are not bound by geographical or disciplinary boundaries.

This volume also contains the obituary of one of the foremothers of NCIS: Joanne Lafler (1934-2023). She also was among the cofounders of the Institute for Historical Studies and H-Scholar. Margaret DeLacy – another foremother – provides a fascinating introduction to someone I wish I could have met. The three founders of NCIS – Joanne Lafler, Margaret DeLacy and Georgia White – also established the first publication of TIS, a newsletter bearing the same name as this journal. Joanne Lafler wrote about topics from an 18th-century English actress to the American novelist Jack London, and was also on the cutting edge of digital scholarship. Honor her memory!

Shelby Shapiro, Ph.D.,

General Editor, *TIS*



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS VOLUME

Valerie A. Abrahamsen (Th.D.) is an independent scholar, lecturer and retreat leader whose primary research interests are women in antiquity and New Testament archaeology, especially the site of Philippi, Greece. She is the author of *Goddess and God: A Holy Tension in the First Christian Centuries* (2006); and *Women and Worship at Philippi: Diana/Artemis and Other Cults in the Early Christian Era* (1995) and has published widely including contributions to the *Oxford Companion to the Bible* and many journals.

Keenan Baca-Winters (Ph.D. History) specializes in Iranian history, and his monograph *He Did Not Fear: Xosro Parviz, King of Kings of the Sasanian Empire* was published by Gorgias Press in 2019. He has published in journals such as *Nuova Antologia Militare*, *DABIR*, and *e-Sasanika*, and is currently researching the relationship between trauma and its effects and the creation of narratives in late antiquity

Stanley D.M. Carpenter (Ph.D. British Military History) served as the Strategy and Policy Division Head for the College of Distance Education at the United States Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, and was a Professor of Strategy and Policy. Professor Carpenter retired from the US Navy in June 2009 with the rank of Captain. He authored *Southern Gambit: Cornwallis and the British March to Yorktown* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019) and was co-author of *The War of American Independence, 1763-1783: Falling Dominoes* (Routledge, 2023).

Amanda J. Haste (Ph.D. Musicology; Dip.Trans.IoLET) is an Anglo-French musicologist and academic translator whose research interests include identity construction through music and language. She was adjunct faculty at Aix-Marseille University, France, and co-authored *Constructing Identity in an Age of Globalization* (Paris: Ex Modio, 2015); her monograph *Music and Identity in Twenty-First-Century Monasticism* (Routledge) was published in October 2023.

Gary Herstein (Ph.D. Philosophy) is currently working on various projects relating to the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, the logical forms and presuppositions of measurement, and the connections between spatial reasoning and metaphysics; his publications include (with Randall Auxier) *The Quantum of Explanation* (2017), *Whitehead and the Measurement Problem of Cosmology* (May 2006) and "Davidson and the Impossibility of Psychophysical Laws" (*Synthese* 145 1, 2005).

Jordan Lavender (Ph.D. Spanish Linguistics) taught Spanish and Latin American History at Pomfret School in Pomfret, CT and has conducted sociolinguistic research on the use of minority languages on Twitter in Spain, bilingualism in the linguistic landscapes of Azogues, Ecuador, forms of address in Ecuadorian Spanish, based on ethnographic research in both online and offline contexts, and linguistic considerations in early Biblical exegesis.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

James M. Magrini (Ph.D. Philosophy/Education) taught philosophy and ethics at the College of Dupage (USA) for over fifteen years and was named the college's Outstanding Liberal Arts Educator in 2013. His most recent monographs include *Ethical Responses to Nature's Call: Reticent Imperatives* (Routledge, 2020), *Politics of the Soul in the Alcibiades I* (Peter Lang Press, 2021), and *Philosophical Sojourns in Aesthetics, Existence, and Education* (Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2023).

Vanessa Mongey (Ph.D. History) works on the entangled histories of revolutions in the Atlantic World, her research notably engaging with politics, race, and migration. Her first book, *Rogue Revolutionaries: The Fight for Legitimacy in the Greater Caribbean* won the Chinard prize from the Society of French Historical Studies. Among her publications are a chapter on "Celebrating African culture in the North East of England, 1930s-1940s, to be published by Manchester University Press in *Anti-Racism in Modern Britain: Histories and Trajectories*.

Shelby Shapiro (Ph.D. American Studies) is an Independent Scholar who obtained his Ph.D. with a dissertation on the Yiddish press and how various publications of differing political and religious viewpoints sought to construct different identities for Jewish immigrant women. He has written about Jazz, Anarchism, and the labor movement, and is presently translating Volume 1 of the memoirs of Rudolf Rocker (*The Youth of a Rebel*) from Yiddish to English.

Kevin Hans Waitkuweit (M.A. Sociology, University of Notre Dame) was a Deans' Fellow in the Department of Sociology from 2017 to 2020 and is currently studying for a PhD in the Dept of Disability and Human Development University of Illinois at Chicago. His research interests entail the theoretical paradoxes of identity within sociology and how the meanings of identities are formed and change over time. Using medical diagnoses as a case studies, he has explored the way in which disabilities become identities for diagnosed individuals.



CRITICAL ESSAYS

READING *THE JEFFERSON BIBLE*: ELUCIDATING THE PHILOSOPHY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

James M. Magrini, Ph.D.
(Illinois, USA)

Correspondence should be addressed to: j.magrini@ncis.org

Date submitted: 23 June 2023

Accepted following revisions: 25 August 2023

First published online 30 August 2023

Abstract

This speculative essay is focused on elucidating the ethics of Jesus as they appear in The Jefferson Bible. It offers a systematic view and analysis of Jesus' ethics as they differ from the common view associated with Christianity, which is traditionally related to Divine Command Theory and is deontological in nature. The essay incorporates Jefferson's thoughts on the subject of ethics and Jesus into a study that argues, by interpreting specific sayings and parables of Jesus, for a philosophical notion of ethics sharing a "family resemblance" with/to "agapism," "axiological ethics," and a modified form of "humanism" - an ethics that might be said to begin with what is identified as "sympathetic consensus," which is expressed within Jesus' reference to and philosophizing of the Golden Rule. It unfolds in four sections covering: The approach to Jefferson's Bible; the critique of the philosophical ethics of antiquity; the analysis of the parables of Jesus; and the detailed interpretation of the ethical philosophy of Jesus, which includes the analysis of the ethics of love and dignity, the Golden Rule, and the immediate experience of God and His Kingdom.

Keywords : Jefferson's Bible; Jesus of Nazareth; Ethical Philosophy; New Testament; Agapism



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

INTRODUCTION

This essay is focused on elucidating the philosophy and ethics of Jesus as they appear in *The Jefferson Bible*, which is an abbreviated version of the New Testament (the Gospels) compiled by Jefferson, employing the cut-and-paste method, which highlights Jesus the man and his ethical message. Jefferson excluded Gospel passages focused on the working of miracles, the resurrection, the incarnation, and the ascension, all events that a modern reader might regard as *supernatural* events.¹ The essay offers a systematic view and analysis of Jesus' ethics as they differ from the common view associated with Christianity, which is traditionally related to Divine Command Theory and is *deontological* in nature, i.e., morality grounded in immutable imperatives/duties and the inherent "rightness" (morality) and "wrongness" (immorality) of actions. This speculative essay incorporates Jefferson's thoughts on the ethics of Jesus into a study that argues for a philosophical notion of ethics through interpreting specific sayings and parables of Jesus that share a "family resemblance" with/to "agapism," "axiological ethics,"² and a modified form of "humanism,"³ an ethics that might be said to begin with what is identified as "sympathetic consensus" as is expressed within the Jesus' reference to and philosophizing of the Golden Rule. In attempting to elucidate a view of ethics that Jefferson associates with Jesus, the essay includes analyses of systematic ethics, philosophical writings on Jesus, and contemporary New Testament scholarship focused on the interpretation of the historical Jesus. It is noted, however, that our reading is concerned with exploring the religious and spiritual aspects of Jesus' ethics, a critical concern that is also present to Jefferson's synthesis of the four Gospels, which represents a "harmony," for it weaves passages and relevant strands of text drawn from the (four) Gospels into a single, condensed, and coherent portrait of Jesus. The essay unfolds in four main sections, which explore the following topics: (1) The general approach to *The Jefferson Bible*; (2) Jefferson's critique of antiquity and religion in search of a superior vision of ethics; (3) Jesus as pedagogue and the use and function of parables as exercises in potential soul-transformation; and (4) A Jeffersonian interpretation of the ethics of Jesus of Nazareth, focused on the ethics of love and dignity, the Golden Rule, and the immediate experience of God.

APPROACHING THE JEFFERSON BIBLE: THE CONCERN WITH ETHICS OVER DIVINITY

Writing on *The Jefferson Bible*, Rollston (2020) states the following: "There is no commentary from Jefferson in this text at all, with a few exceptions of a few glosses about historical background...Rather it is just a selection or sections, which could be referred to as 'pericopes'...that Jefferson cut from the canonical Gospels, sections that he considered to be paradigmatic teachings of Jesus of Nazareth" (p. 1).⁴ It must be stated at the outset that since we are attempting to

¹ I thank both reviewers for their helpful suggestions that contributed greatly to improving this paper for publication. I also want to briefly address an issue raised regarding my choice of consulting and referencing the Wilder edition of *The Jefferson Bible* (see works cited) as opposed to other, more recognized editions. In my opinion, the Wilder printing offers intelligent laypersons direct and unadulterated access to the writing without the potential distraction of scholarly commentary through the use of footnotes or endnotes. It is my hope that readers will draw inspiration from this essay to seek out Jefferson's text.

² Axiological ethics focuses on morality as intimately related to values and value systems. "*Axios*" in the Greek refers to that which has value or is worthy of attention and praise (my translation).

³ Humanistic ethics (*secular humanism*) dismisses religion as the necessary foundation for morality and focuses instead on human potential when attempting to navigate the terrain of the normative. Many forms of humanism exist, e.g., Jean-Paul Sartre espouses an *existential* form of humanism and K. Nielsen, who is referenced in this paper, adopts a utilitarian approach to humanism as an *ethics without God*.

⁴ With respect to the use of the term *pericope*, Funk and Hoover (1993) clarify that *pericope* is a Greek term that literally means, "something cut out." It refers to a paragraph in an essay or a segment of a well-ordered story" (p. 547). The act of compiling a series of *pericopes* accurately describes Jefferson's approach to his succinctly revised version of the Gospels, wherein segments (*pericopes*) are carefully selected to reveal a living characterization of the morals of the historical Jesus, or as Jefferson prefers, "Jesus of Nazareth."



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

interpret, by means of discerning the voice, vision, and message of Jesus emanating from the Gospel sayings and parables selected by Jefferson, it is difficult, if not impossible, to conclude with any degree of certainty that when (and if) Jesus states x , he indeed means y or z . Our approach aligns with Funk's (2002) conclusion: "All that we can hope for is a glimpse or intimation into Jesus' overall vision," and since Jesus' way of teaching works to challenge and "frustrate moralizing proclivities," his parables are "open to multiple and deeper interpretations as a way of keeping them open to reinterpretation in ever new contexts" (p. 12). Funk urges those embarking on the interpretation of the words and deeds of Jesus, to "follow their lead and figure out what meaning to give them in our own circumstances" (p. 12).

Jefferson sought to communicate the philosophical elements of Jesus' vision and project within an interpretive and radical abridgment of the four canonical Gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke, John), serving as a corrective to what Jefferson identifies as the *corruptions of Christianity*,⁵ which Jefferson believes wrongly links Jesus' teaching and message primarily to the issue of divinity and his role as the "Christ," and so, as Tatum (1984) observes, this myopic view radically minimalizes what moved and most concerned Jefferson, namely, the ethical lessons that can be drawn from the "true style and spirit of the rich fragments [Jesus] left us" (p. 37). Jaspers (1967), who much like Jefferson, considers Jesus to be a paradigmatic philosopher, observes, "The historic reality of Jesus the man, which is so extremely important for us in the history of philosophy, is without interest to the doctors of the faith, either among rebels or the orthodox believers" (p. 86). In this way, as Cupitt (2009) observes, Jefferson is reminiscent of the Enlightenment critics of Christianity that "gradually broke up the gigantic religious ideology built around [Jesus, and] at last began to recover his original message" (p. 19).⁶ To this end, Jefferson explicitly states that he will leave certain questions unanswered, certain issues unaddressed, specifically those focused on Jesus's divinity.

The Jefferson Bible presents a succinct and unique portrait of Jesus and the essence of his ethical vision. The teachings of Jesus, as expressed through sayings and deeds, stress the pursuit of radical acts of charity and self-sacrifice, e.g., when urging followers to sell everything and give to the poor and destitute (Mark 10:21) or when eschewing the role of master and kneeling to wash the disciples' feet, and assuming the role of a slave (John 13:1-20). Corley (2002) claims that we can imagine Jesus "espousing either a radical Hebrew ideal of charity or a Hellenistic philosophical ethic, an ongoing altruistic ethic in the Kingdom of God" (p. 152). What we attempt to cull from *The Jefferson Bible*, this due to that lack of explicit interpretation or commentary on the passages he cut from the canonical Gospels and selected for inclusion, might be related to what in New Testament scholarship falls under the general scholarly pursuit: *The Search for the Historical Jesus*. Funk and Hoover (1993) contend that Jefferson scrutinized the Gospels with the intent to separate Jesus' historical moral ideals and ethical practices, "from the encrustations of Christian doctrines," or the

⁵ Although included by Jefferson, scholars generally recognize that the Book of John is primarily a divine "proclamation" Gospel, highlighting the many well-known, "I am" declarations that are attached to Jesus. For example, in relation to our focus on parables, Fortna (2002) points out that the "very form of the sayings in John underscores their late, Christian character...His parables usually end with a twist, a question, a startling assertion that forced the hearer to decide what was meant. But nothing of this sort is found in John; there are simply no parables there. In their place, usually set within long monologues, there are riddles and extended metaphors that are exclusively Christological" (p. 226-227). However, we note that in John the centrality of the ethics of Jesus, as related to our analysis, is introduced as a "new commandment" or ethical "directive," that the disciples *should* love each other, just as Jesus has loved them and has demonstrated, modelled, and instantiated what might be understood as *love-in-action*. (John 13:34; cf. 15:9-11; 15:12) See also: Burge, G. M. (1992). *Interpreting the Gospel of John*. Michigan: Baker Book House.

⁶ As to the *corruptions of Christianity* of which Jefferson speaks, Cupitt (2008) argues: "Barely twenty years after Jesus' death a great religion began to grow up around his name. From the first it began to falsify his message: it exalted him to the heavenly world, it made him into the personification of his own teaching, it made of therefore himself just one more sovereign lawgiver, and built around him the ugly old apparatus of authoritarian, mediated religion – and so eventually it became a standing denial of his original message" (pp. 19-20)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

systematization of the Christian religion (p. 3). We reiterate that Jefferson did not seek to separate the Jesus of history from the Jesus of faith, but rather to separate Jesus the man from the figure of the “Christ,” i.e., all associations with divinity as a miracle-working messianic figure, and beyond, the Son of God, one fulfilling, through his resurrection, prophecy emerging from the Old Testament.

Tatum (1984) argues that Jefferson’s approach to Jesus is characterized by a rationalist view, for Jefferson holds the underlying belief that the miraculous or supernatural occurrences in the Gospels “contradict the laws of nature” (p. 39). In line with what we stated earlier, Tatum also goes on to recognize, “Jefferson highlighted Jesus’ teachings and omitted all supernatural occurrences including the miracles” (39). Indeed, even the common narrative structure, so essential to the Gospels’ accounts of Jesus’ life, ministry, betrayal and death, is present only in a threadbare form in Jefferson’s account, and his inclusion of the precepts of Jesus’ mortality, make his account unique and valuable to those embracing a philosophical mindset. It is the case, as Hoover (2002) contends, that Jesus’ use of “sapiential speech” included instances of instruction through direct (*protreptic*) exhortation, which might be understood as communicating moral commandments, we however, following Jefferson, opt for the term “precept” when addressing the principles of Jesus’ ethical ideals that he embraces, espouses, and puts into practice. Cupitt (2009) echoes this view and argues that when examining the philosophy of Jesus, “the first and most important point to be grasped is what is implied by putting ethics first in a uniquely thoroughgoing way,” for as we discuss below, Jesus moves away from the “old custom of deriving ethics [exclusively] from cosmology [i.e.,] seeing the moral life in terms of conformity to religious Law” (p. 87). So radical is Jesus’ project, as Crossan (1992) argues, that the parables, aphorisms, and exhortative sayings call for the transvaluation of traditional notions of ethics, for Jesus reveals to us, “how the logic of [traditional] ethics is undermined by the mystery of God and that, if one can accept it, it is the most critical moral experience of all” (p. 80).

JEFFERSON’S CRITIQUE OF ANTIQUITY AND RELIGION: THE QUEST FOR A SUPERIOR VISION OF ETHICS

In his justification for addressing the ethics of Jesus, Jefferson compares and contrasts Jesus’ teaching with the philosophers of antiquity and the religious moral system consistent with the practice of Judaism. Naming the ancient philosophers Pythagoras, Socrates, Epicurus, Cicero, Epictetus, and Seneca, Jefferson argues that their exclusive concerns were on self-inquiry and the development of the soul or intellect, e.g., engaging in practices and exercises that quell and control the raging passions that have the potential to corrupt the soul. According to Jefferson, these thinkers failed to adequately develop a legitimate view of *interpersonal* ethics. However, as we note, this critical assessment of Jefferson is undeniably debatable (Magrini 2017, 2018, 2021). However, Jefferson does raise an interesting concern regarding the range and scope of what constitutes ethical *interpersonal* relationships within the philosophy of antiquity, and his claim is that their view of ethics was neither expansive enough nor inclusive enough; their view of ethics did not, according to Jefferson (2007), equally welcome and include all types of people into “the [loving] circle of benevolence,” and beyond this, it ignored a view of ethics that inculcates “peace, charity, and love to our fellow-men, [it failed to] embrace with benevolence the whole family of mankind” (p. 9). Judaism also fails to adequately address our interpersonal connection to others, which exists outside and so extends beyond the inner circle of its systematized religious practices and rituals. So, according to Jefferson, the morality of Judaism was restricted and narrow in scope, and Jefferson goes so far as to state, and erroneously we must add, that the Jewish view of morality is anti-social in nature, and so requires a radical reassessment and reformation.

Cupitt (2009), who has perhaps published more on the philosophy of Jesus than any academic, reiterates elements of Jefferson’s view when contending that early Christian communities made

the decision *not* to impose observance of the Jewish Law upon gentile converts, [and this decision] could be read, and by many was read, as asserting that the new Christian ethic of mutual *human* love and



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

forbearance had in a radical way fulfilled, displaced, and made quite redundant the old ethics of revealed divine Law. (p. 11)

Much like Jefferson, Cupitt is also highly critical of organized Christianity, and he believes that one devastating consequence of the entire mono-*theistic* tradition in religion and morality is that it has “produced too many tirelessly self-righteous people who neglect their neighbors” (p. 7).

We refrain from offering a detailed analysis of Jefferson’s embrace of religion or speculation on how this view might have manifested within his understanding and practice of politics.⁷ However, a few thoughts on the topic of religious belief are in order as we proceed, and in the following quotation, Jefferson (2007) succinctly expresses his personal relationship to Christianity, which is grounded in and driven by an undeniable sense of the ethical:

Say nothing of my religion. It is known to my God and myself alone. Its evidence before the world is to be sought in my life. If that has been honest and dutiful to society, the religion which has regulated it cannot be a bad one. (p. 7, emphasis in original)

Jefferson claims that Judaism is *deistic* in nature, and this claim requires clarification. *Deism*, as it is understood in the contemporary philosophy of religion, is the belief in a divine, omnipotent being who creates and establishes the universe and sets in motion its mechanistic unfolding, but does not respond to prayer and refrains from intervening in human affairs. In this view, God is *transcendent* but is not *immanent*. However, against Jefferson’s claim, Judaism, as a monotheistic religion, does indeed embrace both a *transcendent* and *immanent* God (*Yahweh*), who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and omni-moral. As Pojman and Fieser (2009) point out, the idea of an intimately personal and loving God is wholly consistent with this monotheistic view (p. 56). Jefferson also embraces an omnipotent and omni-present God, which is in fact wholly consistent with the expression of *theism*. God is the prime mover (unmoved mover) who creates a rational universe, which can be approached and understood through reasoned thought. For Jefferson, God did indeed intervene in human affairs, making his presence known in time. However, according to Jefferson, God’s power to intervene is to be understood in terms of His manifestation through natural laws. Jefferson denies the Holy Trinity, and on that account, might be classified as a *Unitarian*, but although he embraces the active *transcendent* and *immanent* monotheistic God of *theism*, his strict rational denial of miracles and supernatural occurrences might be said to obliquely smuggle in elements of *deism*. Interestingly, this theological term is traceable to Samuel T. Coleridge, and as Cupitt (2006) recognizes, indicates a view that “affirms only the humanity of Christ” (p. 109). In line with this understanding, Jefferson’s view of the teachings of Jesus is focused on giving priority to a reasoned and concrete view of ethics, and for Jefferson, Jesus’ morality has its roots and is therefore undeniably grounded in a spiritual relationship to God, which includes faith and worship.

JESUS AS PEDAGOGUE AND THE USE AND FUNCTION OF PARABLES: SELF-REFLECTION AND THE POTENTIAL ETHICAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOUL

Sanders (1993) contends that Jesus might be referred to as a “rabbi” or teacher of the Law, and traditionally a rabbi “derived authority from studying and interpreting the Bible. Jesus doubtless did both, but it was not scriptural

⁷ In a letter of April 12, 1803 that Jefferson (2007) wrote to Dr. Benjamin Rush, which accompanied Jefferson’s manuscript (*TJB*), he indicates that the ideas contained in the manuscript are “very different from the Anti-Christian system imputed on me by those who know nothing of my opinions,” and in confiding this manuscript to Rush, Jefferson is confident that “it will not be exposed to the malignant perversions of those who make every word from me a text for new misrepresentations and calumnies.” Jefferson concludes, with a succinct and direct proclamation, “I am a Christian in the only sense in which [Jesus] wished any one to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others” (p. 8).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

interpretation that gave him a claim on other people," instead, Jesus had such a powerful impact on people, and we might add, on history, because he "offered an immediate and direct route to God's love and mercy" (p. 239). Funk and Dewey (2015) indicate that both Jesus and John the Baptist were part of the "sons of Lady Wisdom" lineage that "reflects the prevailing Jewish Wisdom tradition," wherein it is believed that "Lady Wisdom (*Sophia/Hokmah*) not only manifested throughout time but had offspring" (p. 93). Hedrick (2002) offers a crucial caveat to this understanding of Jesus as a teacher and specifically a wise man, for Hedrick argues that Jesus "was certainly not a teacher, sage, or wise man in the modern sense (or even ancient) sense of the word, i.e., in the sense he passed on the content of community wisdom," for indeed a major theme of Jesus' public discourse, which includes the communication of an ethical component bound up with "the imperial rule of God, involved a new way of conceptualizing life that completely reversed conventional value systems" (p. 71). Cupitt (2009) also contends that, to fully comprehend the philosophical implications of Jesus' profound ethical vision, it is necessary to understand him as a radical "*transgressor*, someone who 'walks across' and violates deeply drawn social lines and boundaries [and as] an *anti-traditionalist* and *non-conformer*, and never a docile, conforming 'sheep'" (p. 78). Jesus' new vision of existing reality diverges from the notion that the world as fixed and established, recalcitrant to the efforts of the human will, for if we demonstrate the courage to follow his difficult moral teachings, we open the possibility of bringing into existence, and hence establishing, a transformed reality, including the *transvaluation* of traditional values. In this way Jesus might be said to be "an extreme voluntarist, someone who insists that if we choose a new world with sufficient decisiveness, then we'll find ourselves in that new world," which Jesus calls God's Kingdom (p. 79).

As stated in the foregoing section, Jesus' teachings differ from and are for Jefferson superior to those of the ancient philosophers and the Jewish tradition in morality emerging from the *Torah* and represented in the rabbinic tradition. Jefferson (2007) informs us that although the ethics of Jesus relate to both family and friends, his vision of morality is more accurately described as a form of "universal philanthropy," a spiritual form of *egalitarian humanism*, limited not only to the "kindred and friends, to neighbors and countrymen, but to all mankind, gathering all into one family, under the bonds of love, charity, peace, common wants and common aids" (p. 10). Stressing this issue, Jefferson includes the parable *The Feast* ("The Bidden to a Feast"), where a certain man of considerable wealth gives a banquet and is ultimately left with an all but empty dining hall. He then orders his servant to leave no stone unturned and, "Go into the streets of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, the blind," and when guests arrive, the room is still not at full capacity, and so he orders the servant to search the "the highways and hedges, and compel [all] to come in, that my house may be filled" (p. 57). (Thom 64:1-12; Matt 22:1-14; Luke 14:16-24) The thrust of this parable, as some observe, such as Crossan (2002), inspires a notion of an ethic grounded in inclusivity, equity, and equality, representing a "social challenge of an egalitarian table," a radical "social challenge on the heart of society, the table, the place where persons meet to eat, the place where they establish a confront the [traditional, accepted, unchallenged] social order" (p. 164).

According to Jefferson (2007), rather than focusing on an ethics grounded exclusively in rule or duty driven behavior or action (*deontology*), Jesus, in terms of his commentary and amendment to the commandments and Laws of the *Torah* and Moses, recognized that "the Hebrew code laid hold of action only," whereas Jesus sought to extend ethics and so "pushed his *scrutinies* [ethical concerns] *into the heart of man*" (p. 10, emphasis added). Echoing Jefferson's observations, and to extend this line of reasoning, we note that Cupitt (2009) argues that the early Christian tradition that is traceable to the historical Jesus, "involved a shift from realism to emotivism, as the moral standard itself was brought down from heaven and relocated in the world of human feelings and relationships, the world of 'the heart'" (p. xiv). With this crucial move, Jesus radicalizes the "familiar themes he found in the Hebrew prophets, namely God's promise to relocate himself within the human heart" (p. 88).⁸ Such a reading indicates that the *humanistic* elements that

⁸ We note that where what we have termed *humanistic ethics*, Cupitt (2009) indicates that it is possible to classify and thus refer to



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Jefferson highlights represent an “important incentive, supplementary to the other,” namely, purely religious, “motives to moral conduct” (p. 88). We detail this issue below in our analysis of the sayings and parables of Jesus, which Jefferson emphasizes when illustrating Jesus’ living philosophy that guides and inspires his ethical interpersonal relationships with fellow humans, drawing its life and legitimacy from the transpersonal spiritual communion with God.

Parable, in the Greek *parabolē*, refers to comparisons between objects, events, and people, presented in the form of short narratives, which are related to similes, but their messages are more direct and less complex than metaphors. We separate Jesus’ use of parables from his incorporation of both aphorisms and proverbs. It is correct to refer to parables as example stories that inform readers through interpretive renderings. Funk, Scott, and Butts (1988) inform us that the purpose of the parables, despite the simplicity of presentation, is to invite the hearer to actively participate in the story, and due to its strange or puzzling content, it inspires active thought in the effort to offer a possible interpretation. Jefferson importantly recognizes that Jesus’ parables are indispensable to Jesus’ pedagogy and they reflect an undeniable ethical dimension, for they convey to readers, once interpreted, attitudes that motivate actions that *should* either be endorsed as ethical or rejected as unethical. However, as Funk (2002) stresses, parables “do not intend to provide their hearers with explicit instructions for dealing with specific situations, but convey a vision...in the confidence that once hearers have caught the vision, they will be able to recognize on their own what a particular [ethical] situation calls for” (p. 53). The parables also convey critiques of and amendments to the Laws of the Hebrew religious tradition, as they offer revised and renewed insight into a new, re-imagined world, a transformed ethical reality (Scott 2001; 2002). As Crossan (1992) contends, in line with what Jefferson indicates regarding the “inward” ethical turn, the care for the soul and disposition, the parables confront the “hearers with the necessity of saying the impossible and having their world turned upside down and radically questioned in its presuppositions,” with the goal to “break abruptly into human consciousness and overturn prior values, closed opinions, set judgments, and established conclusions” (p. 64).

Since, as stated, parables do not work by means of direct transmission or in terms of transfer learning, as they are not explicitly didactic in nature, they function more in terms of the type of inquiry and revelation consistent with *participatory* philosophical discourse, for they invite the listener’s active participation in the deciphering of their message. Crossan states: “Jesus created stories for his audience to interpret on their own,” ethics, we might say, in relation to the “empire of God becomes discerned when the listener actively works out the parables” (pp. 4-5). It must be stressed, however, if those hearing Jesus’ parables are able to understand, and ultimately, through interpretation and self-reflection in dialogue, embrace their messages by actively incorporating them into their lives, the potential exists for a spiritual and ethical transformation to the mindset, the soul. This transformative process, as Funk (2002) points out, depends “on both the tenacity with which one holds to the inherited scheme of things, and one’s willingness to cut ties to this comfortable tradition...the tension under such circumstances does not come easily” (p. 10). Through this participation, as Tatum (1982) argues in relation to Crossan’s claims regarding the potential for parables to overturn values, the participant experiences a radical crisis in knowledge (*aporia*), shaking the soul, inducing change or repentance (*metanoēō*), and, as stated, this transformation occurs through sustained reflection and self-examination, leading to a new or renewed relationship to God (p. 151).⁹ For example, in the parable of the *Prodigal Son*, listeners are

Jesus’ form of ethics as *utopian radical humanism*. Cupitt states, as related to “recent Anglo-Saxon moral philosophy, Jesus is an *emotivist* and a *voluntarist*, and in terms of English poetry he asks us to ‘live from the heart’” (p. 88).

⁹ Tatum (1982) explains that there is a suggestion among some New Testament scholars that in reading, for example, Mark 4:10-12, Jesus is adopting an esoteric approach to the parables and the intended audience thereof. If there is to be an understanding of Jesus as working to establish a secret sect, “the purpose of the parables is to conceal the message from outsiders - lest they accept it! Thus he identifies the parables as a means of concealment not revelation. The parables obfuscate. They do not communicate” (p. 147). In line with Jefferson’s view regarding Jesus’ desire to communicate his message to as many people who would listen and respond, Tatum claims the in Mark words and sayings are either wrongly attributed to the historical Jesus or are additions by the early Christian communities. Thus Tatum stresses the parables “exoteric” function, and in relation to our



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

subject to a *reversal* of what might normally seem ethical, again, pushing against and challenging what is commonly understood about fairness, equity, and justice (Luke 15:11-32).¹⁰ For the youngest son squandered the father's inheritance, he was uncaring, wasteful, and unethical, and yet upon his return, after being broke, destitute, and hungry, his father showed compassion and forgiveness and goes on to plan a great feast in honor of his return (redemption). The eldest son, justifiably confounded by this behavior, is told by his father that accepting his younger son back into the fold, and forgiving his trespasses is the right, and ethical thing to do in this situation or set of circumstances. For the prodigal son was once dead and is now alive, *and was lost, and is now found*. Jesus reminds us with this parable that we *ought to* behave just and equitable and forgive sinners and celebrate their redemption, just as God would do. It is possible to live this ethical precept when our transformed attitude or disposition (internal) is instantiated and hence expressed in and through our ethically motivated actions (external).

A JEFFERSONIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH: ETHICS OF LOVE AND DIGNITY, GOLDEN RULE, AND IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE OF GOD

Typically, New Testament analyses focus on Jesus' divinity and prophetic eschatology and relegate ethics to a secondary or tertiary role, most notably as this eschatology is presented in the Gospel of Mark. There is a way to graduate beyond this view, which Jefferson endorses, and his understanding of the Gospels and the teachings of Jesus, as related to what was earlier introduced, might be labeled an ethics without eschatology, or ethics set within a unique and reconceptualized view of eschatology. As stated, when speaking of the philosophy of Jesus, Jefferson is making reference to a specific view of ethics that might be understood in terms that are not wholly dependent on any organized, systematic view of religion, or even a nascent form of Christianity, as would be consistent with a contemporary view of religious morality. It is the case that when examining the sayings and parables of Jesus that Jefferson has selected and arranged for readers, the theory and practice of ethics encountered diverges from the traditional view of *deontological* morality, which excludes from the deliberative process of moral determination consequences, personal motivation, character, situation, and the concern for a sense of moral development or progress that is undeniably present to Jesus' view. When considering the issue of *moral progress*, Selsam (1965) is clear: "The warp of ethics lies in man's ability to see a contradiction between what he is, how he lives, and what he could be and how he should live" (p. 13).¹¹ The phenomenon of moral progress presupposes the existence of a malleable character, a disposition open and amendable to change and transformation, and is an idea of supreme importance and value within Jesus' vision, which embraces

interpretation, observes that most scholars are in agreement on the view that "Jesus intended for his Kingdom message to be understood by the general public" (p. 147), and so Jesus' call for the "radical reversal of one's life" represents a *universal* call for repentance (p. 149).

¹⁰ Funk and Hoover (1993) state that this parable might be linked with such stories that stress the following theme: *what was once lost, has now been found*, and it deals with the supreme value of repentance and the authentic ethical transformation of the soul or character, and this theme is encountered in the *Parable of the Lost Sheep* (Luke 15:4-7); Matt. 18:12-14) and the *Parable of the Lost Coin* (Luke 15:8-9). The *Parable of the Prodigal Son* can also be read in an allegorical manner, for in the "style favored by many in the early Christian movement: the father is understood to stand for God, the younger son the gentiles, the elder son for the Judeans or the pharisees" (157).

¹¹ When drawing the crucial distinction between what "is" and "ought," or "what is supposed to be" and "what ought to be," Hoover (2002) elucidates the distinction between the Pharisees ethical stance and that of Jesus, and states that the Pharisees sought to reform "Judaism in a perfectionist direction," and so their "traditional wisdom of the Pharisees was about how things are 'supposed to be,'" whereas in stark contrast, "the visionary wisdom of Jesus was about how things ought to be" (p. 48). With this distinction it is undeniable that based on Hoover's conclusions, Jesus spearheaded the move to push ethics into the realm or register of the *normative*, and his radical project might be summed up in terms of his enacting a "vision of the way things *ought to be*," while working tirelessly to challenge and "call the legitimacy of the way things are into question" (p. 43, emphasis in original).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

the concern for an internal, attuned ethical state of soul expressive of motives concerned with doing the right (moral) thing for the right (moral) reasons. This indicates one is ethically predisposed, educated, and otherwise inspired, to behave in such a manner, this despite the consequences resulting from the actions performed. This move to internalize ethics stands in contrast to religious morality grounded in *action-based* theory, which according to Pojman and Fieser (2009), is the view that we must judge people based on their actions alone, and not on their moral motives or intentions. *Action-based* ethics requires the moral agent's unwavering sense of duty to indelible principles that transcend any and all circumstances, and it discounts the idea of *moral progress* and the potential for character development, and this we linked earlier with *deontological ethics*.

For example, in monotheistic *divine command theory*, our actions attain the status of "ethical" when they strictly conform to the commandments of God's divine will, and we might say, actions emerging from this sense of duty to God are necessary, and never contingent upon what Kant (1958) in his *deontological* system identifies as "*talents* of the mind...*character...gifts of fortune...health, and the general well-being and contentment with one's condition which is called happiness*," including the sense of moral satisfaction accompanying ethical behavior (pp. 75-76, emphasis in original).¹² Instead, what is expressed through the parables Jefferson includes, which as stated function as dialogic, self-reflective exercises, points to a vision of ethics stressing motive and character and the ethical development thereof, in terms of inspiring a potential change or transformation to the soul, i.e., the "turn" (*epistrephō*) toward the truth (*alētheia*) and repentance (*metanoēō*), all the while focusing on the "right" or "good" intention as the origin and hence indicator of moral rightness. Jaspers (1967), in his influential philosophical reading of Jesus, pays special attention to this moment of transformation to the soul, stressing that the demands that the ethics of Jesus make on us, as discussed, radically alters our attitude, influencing our relationships in the world, and the demands made "are never fully expressed in instructions that need merely to be followed, [for] in order to understand them, one must experience some sort of transformation, a rebirth, a new awareness of reality, an illumination" (p. 90). For Jaspers, the immediacy of the transformation demanded by the teachings of Jesus are reflected in the *Parable of the Sower*, for when Jesus' ethical message is embraced and internalized, we are attuned, and this deepens our relationship to God, we are like "the good seed in good earth stands for those who listen to the message and hold on to it with a good fertile heart, and produce fruit through perseverance" (p. 90). (Luke 8:11-15)

Although distancing the ethics of Jesus from ethics that are *deontological* or *objectivist* in nature, we argue it is still possible to retain a unique sense of universalizability, or at the very least, a sense of *trans-subjective* legitimacy, and this is bound to the phenomenon of *sympathetic consensus*, which relates to Jesus' embrace of the Golden Rule as found in the *sermon on the mount* (Matt 5:1-7:27). As introduced, Jesus' ethical teachings often, but not always, focus on the exposition and amendment of the *Torah*, and the two main or grounding ethical precepts that Jesus embraces and espouses, which are focused on "love" and derived from scripture (Deut 6:4-5; Lev 19:8), are highlighted by Jefferson (2007): "Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart and soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself...this do, and thou shalt live" (p. 54). (Mark 12:28-34) To abide by and adhere to these precepts, in thought and action, i.e., to *instantiate* and *live* these precepts, is worth more than "all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (p. 76). As Tatum (1982) stresses, for Jesus, love represents the cardinal ethical category, and is understood and embraced as *agapē*, the embodiment of Christian love. This is described in greater detail by Hoover (2002) in the following terms: The love called for by Jesus

¹² The Golden Rule, which Jesus embraces, as we show, might be read as a kind of "moral test," and yet Kant would disagree, for the Golden Rule would be classified by Kant as yet another instance and expression of the *hypothetical imperative* because it is driven by *inclination, want, and desire*, all of which have no place within Kant's moral system, which is focused heavily on our *duty* to the *categorical imperative*.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

is not affection, for which the [*Koinē*] Greek verb *phileo* would have been used, but unconditional good will, in Greek *agapao*, the verb used throughout the New Testament to characterize God's love for humankind...The love of human friendship is reciprocal; the love of God is unilateral; it is grounded in God's unlimited goodness, not in the mutuality of the likeminded. (p. 56)

Following Robinson (1976), it is possible to identify the form of ethics Jesus practices and preaches as "*agapism/agapeism*," which is, in direct terms, concerned with the manner and degree to which we pledge and dedicate our love to both God and our neighbors (p. 69). This idea has crucial implications for the directionality bound up with the ethics of Jesus, and this issue is indeed intimated in *The Jefferson Bible*, for it is possible, as Cupitt (2009) argues, to conceive ethical self-transcendence in a way that is freed from its servitude to an immutable objective law, and this demonstrates a concern for a *horizontal* form of human transcendence, which indeed harbors and includes a vertical and divine directionality, but does not embrace the view wherein the relationship to one's fellow human being and neighbor is relegated to the status of a secondary concern. For in moral objectivism, as Cupitt observes, "wrongdoing [is] regarded as a sin against God, rather than an offense against a wronged *fellow human*," but Jesus' radicalized ethics, and this is consistent with and traceable to Jefferson's view, places a heavy emphasis "upon the 'horizontal' relationship to the fellow human." (p. 13).

The new and bold ethical precept to love God and humanity, which instantiates the vision inspiring and guiding Jesus' ministry manifests in three ways: (1) through Jesus' direct statements or precepts, which unlike parables or allegories serve a didactic function, (2) through the revelation of an ethical ideal that emerges by means of listeners and followers of Jesus interpreting parables and allegories, and (3) through Jesus' immediate, concrete actions which are guided by a disposition that has been attuned by the experience of God's love, love of God, and love of fellow human beings. The *sermon on the mount*, which we discuss in detail below, is composed of sayings or precepts that serve to offer a formal and radical commentary on the *Torah*, wherein Laws are transformed in light of Jesus' new vision and philosophy. The prohibitions against murder, adultery, divorce, swearing, resistance to evil, and, as we explore, the fundamental ethical precept to love, are all reinterpreted in a way that jolts listeners out of their common or traditional ways of understanding. The new precepts contained in the sermon are referred to as the "antitheses," because they offer a view that contrasts the Laws that have been given by the prophets and accepted in traditional religious and moral practice. Jesus, however, assures the gathered crowd that his intent is not to dismantle the laws or the prophets, but rather to fulfill these laws in a new way for a new time and purpose. With respect to love (*agapē*), Jesus states,

Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that thy hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. (Jefferson, 2007, p. 24) (Matt 5:44; Luke 10:30-35)

To love one's neighbor as oneself, requires a radical reinterpretation of the commonly held understanding of what it is to be a neighbor, calling for us to extend, in relation to love, the definition and meaning of "neighbor" to include all of humanity, wherein the human race becomes and so is accepted and embraced as one's broad and inclusive brethren. This ethical precept and idea stands antithetic to the common view that insists we extend our love only to family and friends, but Jesus requires more, for it is easy to "salute your brethren only," and so the love Jesus calls for transcends our immediate brethren and opens a vista into a broader, far more inclusive community, which includes, strangers, sinners, and even our enemies (Jefferson, 2007, p. 24). Just as God's love knows no bounds, so too should humans aspire to embody this unconditional love and bestow it on others, and to reiterate, not only to friends, fellows, neighbors, those who will reciprocate love, but beyond this, love must also be extended to all people. To accomplish this, we must establish and nurture through love our intimate relationship with God, and hence become children of God. With respect to this difficult and demanding ethical precept ("*to love*") Funk and Hoover (1993) contend that this



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

represents, “the centrality of the love commandment [in relation to] Jesus’ repeated distinction between the qualitative fulfilment of God’s will and the formal observance of the Law, especially ritual Law” (p. 67).¹³

In the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:30-35), the helpful Samaritan tends to an injured man on the road, probably a Judean, while others, including a priest and Levite, pass him by displaying what is far beyond heedless indifference, and more likely an ingrained sense of malice, the antithesis of the love Jesus embraces and teaches. The Samaritan’s actions born of an ethical soul, is associated by Jesus with the “Good” and the ethical, for the Samaritan shows true compassion and solicitous concern, ignoring the rift between the Samaritans and the Jews regarding the worship of God. Indeed, the Samaritan is seemingly blind to the animosity between the groups, traditionally conceived as *enemies*, for he is more concerned with loving fellow humans. This, as we have stated, is because Jesus emphasizes the notion of an ethical, altruistic attitude that is consistent with God’s love and a higher notion of human love (*agapē*), and this idea serves as perhaps the defining message of the parable, as we now explore. Importantly, not only does the Samaritan care for the man’s wounds, he goes beyond this, for he places him on his own beast and leads him to an inn and then provides money to the innkeeper with the promise that he will reimburse the innkeeper for any extra expenses incurred. The Samaritan, according to Jesus’ definition, was a good and ethical neighbor to the injured man, demonstrating pity, compassion and solicitous care, and so embodies the ethical ideal of *agapē*, i.e., love permeates his soul and motivates his ethical disposition to act.

Crossan (1992) informs us that the parable includes characters that are familiar to the listeners, but its message, when interpreted and taken to heart, induces a reversal, so that the world of the hearer is shaken up and inverted. The “whole thrust of the story demands that one say what cannot be said, what is a contradiction in terms: Good = Samaritan” (p. 62). The point is not merely that “one should help a neighbor in need,” far beyond this, “when good (clerics) and bad (Samaritans) become, respectively, bad and good, a world is being challenged,” an entire set of ethical beliefs is at issue, one’s present disposition is challenged, “and we are faced with polar reversal” (p. 63). Crossan argues that this type of radical reversal, which to reiterate, is highly reminiscent of the way legitimate dialogic philosophy unfolds, opens the possibility that one’s thought and action becomes open to critical self-inquiry, reinterpretation, and potential revision. For the hearer, in and through the interpretation and subsequent understanding of the story, struggles with the contradictory dualism inherent in the concept of the Samaritan being “good,” as this contradiction expresses, because it is grounded in, Jesus new precept to love (*agapē*) humankind wholly and unconditionally.

As Jefferson (2007) points out, Jesus’ embodies what it is like to “live under the bonds of love,” and through his ministry, through his concrete actions, Jesus instantiates and so models for his followers and intimate disciples, an ethics embracing charity, peace, compassion, acceptance, respect, hope, and as we have stressed, love - bound intimately with and drawing inspiration from God’s all-encompassing love (*agapē*) (p. 6). Jefferson included crucial *pericopes* from the Gospels that highlight Jesus, in a manner that challenged the Hebrew tradition, fraternizing and embracing with open heart and arms the disenfranchised, marginalized, and outcast, e.g., the poor, the downtrodden, and those deemed unclean by the Scribes and Pharisees. In more direct terms, Jesus consorts openly with sinners, this to the chagrin of those outside Jesus’ ministry, those who misunderstand him and even hatch plots against him. As is well known, Jesus had a special place in his heart for children, for he even urges his followers, beyond showing love and acceptance to

¹³ When speaking of ritual Law, we are probably most familiar with Jesus’ reinterpretation of the Sabbath, altering and even ignoring dietary rituals, e.g., dining with undesirables and the refusal to wash one’s hands before partaking in a communal meal (Mark 7:1-13; Matt. 15:1-9). For as we discuss, it is not the things we put inside us that corrupt the soul, but instead it is what comes out of us, what issues forth, produced in and through our thoughts and actions, that holds the potential to defile our character (Mark 7:14-15; Matt. 15:10).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

children, to *emulate* them, for they are “the greatest in the kingdom of heaven...Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Jefferson, 2007, p. 45).

This type of emulation, as related to Jesus’ ethical outlook, is grounded in what Hoover (2002) refers to as Jesus’ “cosmic outlook,” or *spiritual orientation*, that sustains the “vision of the Reign of God in which Jesus asks his hearers to trust God’s goodness and power absolutely and to *imitate* God’s indiscriminate generosity unconditionally,” and if we do this, we are living “the good life - life ordered by the ideal of the Good, the way life *ought* to be” (p. 44, my emphasis). To employ both imitation and emulation is a philosophical and pedagogical technique advocated by another great historical teacher of ethics, namely, Aristotle, who believed that behaving ethically or virtuously was not primarily a theoretical exercise, for direct instruction was secondary to the actual practice of ethics in the world or educational setting, and it is crucial that the teacher, according to Aristotle (1999), model ethical behavior for the student when attempting to mold and change the disposition (*hēxis*) or soul (pp. 18-19).¹⁴ Here, importantly, in relation to our discussion of the ethical *turn inward*, into the heart, and the change to the disposition, there must be an understanding, in the ethical education we are describing, of the distinction that Findlay (1970), in his exposition of axiological ethics provides, namely, the difference between and the crucial movement away from, “valuing object *x* towards valuing the attitude which values *x*” (p. 88). For example, in relation to Jesus’ understanding of ethics, this marks the crucial and authentic philosophical transition of the soul from valuing compassionate and benevolent actions to embracing the attitude or mindset that grounds and so produces and inspires actions that are compassionate and benevolent.

One of the most profound and powerfully moving ethical lessons that Jesus offers to his disciples, and is included by Jefferson (2007), traceable to John 13:1-5, is where Jesus kneels before the disciples and washes their feet in a manner that is at once clearly meant to teach through example, while simultaneously, in relation to Findlay’s claims, representative of an action motivated by and born out of a benevolent, compassionate, and loving disposition or soul: “He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments...he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel” (p. 87). In this instance, Jesus is challenging and revaluing the traditional understanding of the relationship between pedagogue (*rabbi*) and student, putting in question the traditional hierarchical, asymmetrical power-relation and dynamic of *master-and-slave*. The reversal that Jesus enacts is so radical that it shocks and embarrasses the disciples, for as Peter exclaims, “Thou shalt never wash my feet,” to which Jesus responds, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me” (p. 87). Jesus explains, as is clearly related to the Golden Rule, that if he, as a master and teacher, took the love and care to wash the feet of his students, they “also *ought* to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example [that you *should* emulate and] do, as I have done to you” (p. 87, emphasis added). This propensity to emulate the “good” and ethical, in recognizing and respecting human dignity, will demonstrate for others the power of love, and through this, Jesus assures them, “all men [will] know that ye are my disciples, if ye have loved one to another” (p. 87). Here, such an act of humility that pushes hard against the common tendency to retain the divided sectarian or tribal mindset embracing the *us against them* or the *we are better than them* mindset and demonstrates a level of servitude, which breaks opens a vista into the good life as it is ordered by an ideal experience of God and ethical understanding of love and goodness.

Of course, an education in ethics by Jesus cannot end with mere imitation or even emulation, it requires, as stressed throughout, an interior dimension that is importantly expressive of motive with the potential for character development, i.e., the *ethical growth of the soul*, an instance of *moral progress* in *praxis*. Jefferson must be commended for recognizing, prior to any systematic New Testament scholarship, that Jesus transforms and pushes ethics away from

¹⁴ Aristotle embraced and practiced “virtue ethics,” which is a form of ethics grounded in “excellent” or virtuous behavior, and the goal of the moral agent is to seek the *virtuous mean* between two extremes of *vice*. For example, Aristotle said that we should, within the specific situations that we find ourselves, work to avoid the extremes (vices) of *cowardice* and *rashness* when striving to behave in a courageous manner.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

"action," as it is understood in the Hebrew tradition, or what we have termed the monotheistic tradition in Divine Command Theory, into the very heart, the interior moral center, of the human being. Cupitt (2009) also recognizes that the ethics of Jesus "radicalized a familiar theme he found in the Hebrew tradition of the prophets, namely, God's promise to relocate himself within the human heart," and, as mentioned, this idea reveals the "family resemblance" between the ethics of Jesus and *humanistic ethics* (p. 88). In this view, it is possible to determine the rightness of an act by examining the motives and intentions undergirding and inspiring the action, this as opposed to judging the ethical legitimacy of our actions by looking to the action itself or the consequences produced (as in Divine Command Theory and consequentialism or utilitarianism). For Jesus, the "goodness" of the character of the moral actor is bound up inextricably with intention, and, as stated, there is the potential in this view for the character to develop and make legitimate ethical progress, two elements or characteristics that tend to be ignored within the type of *action-based*, duty ethics consistent with Divine Command Theory. Crucially, as stated earlier, in this view, related to the idea of *moral progress*, the character is not immutable; there is no hypostatic human essence or substrate that is given in advance by either nature or God, and so the autonomy of the moral actor is stressed, and in Cupitt's philosophical reading of Jesus, this is related to *voluntarism*, the philosophical view that ethical responsibility is intimately bound up with the exercise of the free will. Thus, in the ethics of Jesus there is both the potential and need "to grow as a moral person so that one may be able to take on greater moral responsibility" (11).

We now return to the *sermon on the mount*, for it is here we encounter Jesus' new ethical focus on inner attitudes and motives, for it is not committing the act of murder or adultery that makes one a sinner, but rather "whosoever is *angry* with his brethren without a cause shall be in danger of judgment [and] whoever looketh on a women to lust after her hath [already] committed adultery with her in his heart" (Jefferson 2007, p. 23, emphasis added). (Matt 5:27-29; 5:22) This concern with motive and character is also expressed in Jesus' declaration that there is "nothing from without a man, that enter into him can defile him: but the things that come out of him, those are they that defile the man" (p. 45). (Mark 7:14-15; Matt 15:10; Thom 14:1-5) For it is the case that "out of the *heart* of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders" (p. 45). This dichotomy of interior/exterior also manifests in the concern for the public praying of the pharisees, who seek to put their piety on display, when it is better and right to pray to God in the privacy of one's own room, away from the public eye. Jesus assures his followers that God sees and knows what is truly in the heart, which when ethical and righteous, is where one's true treasure is stored (Matt 6:5-14). Consider also the pharisees' dedication to the ritual cleansing and washing of "hands, cups, brazen vessels, and of tables," which again is the outward pretense of cleanliness, holiness, piety, and righteousness (p. 74). Despite such outward, superficial displays, Jesus assures his followers that their souls, their dispositions, "are full of hypocrisy and inequity," and so they resemble on the outside whited sepulchers, while on the inside they are "full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (p. 11). (Matt 23:27)

Exploring the disposition and its potential for change and development, we turn to Jesus' simple but somewhat perplexing parable centering on a fig tree that consistently fails to bear fruit. (Luke 13:6-9) Funk and Hoover (1993) claim that the *Parable of the Barren Fig Tree* is a story that "lacks a specific application, [although] an exaggerated hope of some sort is implicit, but not specified" (p. 345). However, it is possible, based on our foregoing remarks and interpretation of Jesus' ethics, to understand the gardener or vineyard attendant as advocating for the potential of what might be understood as the turning around, the transformation of barren ground into fertile soil, bringing forth the potential for the tree to eventually produce fruit that is rich and good. The attendant implores the owner, who advocates for its removal, "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it. And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shall cut it down" (Jefferson, 2007, p. 38). Might not the message be interpreted to run thusly: Although the soul and character of the sinner has so far resisted an enlightened transformation, the ethical act of repentance required by Jesus, it is possible that the sinner's attitude will eventually change and come around when given, like the tree, life-sustaining and life-transforming care and attendance, e.g., the precise type of devoted and



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

inspired love, compassion, and charity that Jesus unselfishly grants to all around him. All of this indicates, as Tatum (1984) recognizes, although he assures his readers that he is unconcerned with developing a philosophical portrait of the Nazarene, that Jesus is endorsing the *philosophical ideal* that a “person’s inner disposition and outward words and deeds in relation to others were more important than religious ritual” (p. 35).¹⁵

Recalling Jefferson’s words regarding his Christian beliefs that began the essay, which reveal the relationship between morality and his relationship with God, and while focusing on the ethical thoughts of Jesus, we must consider how this philosophy is intertwined with and dependent on Jesus’ relationship with God and to His Reign or Kingdom. Several New Testament scholars claim the Jesus’ immediate experience of God is an instance of what Dodd (1961) refers to as *realized eschatology*, Crossan (1992) terms *permanent eschatology*, and Sheehan (1986) names *lived eschatology* or “the eschatological present-future,” a novel thesis espousing the view that the vision and message of Jesus’s ministry is to proclaim the ever-present, immediate, and “permanent *presence* of God” (Dodd, 1961, p. 26, emphasis added). This indicates that Jesus was not “proclaiming that God was about to end *this* world, but, seeing this as one view of the world, he was announcing One who shatters [the experience of] world, this one and any other before or after it” (p. 26, emphasis in original). This understanding is also expressed within Jaspers’ (1967) philosophical reading of Jesus, arguing that Jesus had an attuned experience of the presence of the Kingdom of God, which was not an anticipated futural event, rather, a vision and experience that was already “present everywhere and nowhere” (p. 75). God’s Kingdom, His Holy Reign was already present in the life and world of Jesus, and as stated, the mission of Jesus’ ministry set about revealing and announcing this truth, and to reiterate this crucial point, God’s *presence* was not *immanent* or *futural*, it was already and immediately *present*. Jesus’ stories, sayings, aphorisms, and parables, indeed his entire notion of ethics, derive their weight and legitimacy only because the wisdom they shelter and reveal emerges from the *advent* of God’s Kingdom.

Robinson (2002) agrees, stating that the vision and experience of a loving God was at the “core of what Jesus had to say,” and this represents for Jesus, “both the good news [and] reassurance that good would happen to undo one’s plight in actual experience,” but only if, as our point has been throughout, we are able to reach and “call on people to do that good in practice” (p. 15). In line with these thoughts, Funk (2002) observes the following: “Jesus did not have a doctrine of God; he had only an experience of God” (p. 11). Borg (2002) describes Jesus’ unique experience of God in terms of an “ecstatic” occurrence or event, and in the Greek, *ekstasis* indicates that one *stands out and apart from* everyday modes of *being-in-the-world*. This type of transformative experience of the sacred “carries with it a vivid sense of epiphany, a strong subjective [internalized] sense that what one has experienced is indeed a disclosure” of a new reality, ultimately providing an “experiential sense of the reality of God” (p. 132). Such an experience, highlighted by the communion with a source that opens the *noetic* potential for receiving and acquiring new and revelatory forms of knowledge and understanding, which acts to enlighten and transform the disposition or soul. The radicality of such an experience puts in question our traditional notions of the limits of ethics.

Relating this foregoing discussion to Jefferson’s overarching purpose and goal, we envision a view and practice of ethics that is dependent on the love of humankind and self that emerges from the immediate experience of loving and receiving love from God, which is grounded in the decision to dedicate oneself wholly and unconditionally to God. Here, we highlight that Jesus’ relationship to God inspires and fosters not only the love and solicitous care for others, it also

¹⁵ Despite Jefferson downplaying the ethical force of the thought we encounter in the philosophers of antiquity, this notion that we have explored, namely, the consistency between one’s words and deeds, is a common and powerful theme in Plato’s Socrates, e.g., in the *Charmides* Socrates is adamant that the mere knowledge of definitions is not sufficient to make humans morally good. What is required by Socrates, much like our sketch of Jesus, is for us to internalize such definitions of the virtues, which is “living the virtues in *praxis*” (piety, courage, justice, *sophrosyne*, and wisdom), and through this process, we act in such a way as to instantiate the virtues. See also: Sallis, J. (1989). *Being and logos*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

engenders *care for the self*, which importantly includes the dedicated concern for the health or moral well-being of our own subjective soul or *selfhood*. "The rule of God," Tatum (1982) claims, "is spiritual insofar as the individual loves God and [it is] ethical insofar as he loves his neighbor" (p. 139). In this process, which is an unwavering and sustained way of *being-in-the-world*, the aim of Jesus is to inspire and induce a spiritual transformation (*theophany*) in those who follow him, in short, to transform the mind, character, and soul by way of repentance (*metanoëō*), which as stated, amounts to a reversal, a form of self-transcendence that occurs by way of a "revision of direction, a break with the past, a reordering of values and priorities" (p. 137). Robinson (1962) also offers insight into the relationship between self, neighbor, and God, when contending that "the Christian life and Christian ethics [*agapism*] are responsive in character - we love [God] because He first loved us" (p. 82). What is crucial here, is that the form of ethics Robinson discusses, *agapism*, encompasses a much larger sphere than any form or expression of *humanistic* ethics, for in *agapism*, "it is not only man who acts, but also God, and where...truth is not just monologic but dialogic" (p. 84). This form of ethics as related to Jesus might be said to function according to the Golden Rule, which is irreducible to either an adage or quaint slice of proverbial wisdom, for Jesus makes the bold declaration that it represents the Law in its entirety. Here, Jefferson (2007) quotes it: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: For this is the Law and the prophets" (p. 84). Keeping in mind the relationship to God developed, Robinson (2002) provides a way to grasp the Golden Rule in terms of an ethical, and indeed binding and demanding, grounding and guiding principle for action. Keeping in mind the potential for acute instances of human suffering, realizing the we, much like our neighbors, require love, attention, and care in light of human *fragility*, because we understand that all humans are radically limited and God sends the sun and rain on both the just and the unjust, the good and the evil (Matt 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-28). Jesus teaches that we *ought to* always keep the following in mind:

The human dilemma is in large part that we are each other's fate. We are a tool of evil that ruins the other person, as we look out for number one...But if I *would* cease and desist from pushing you down to keep myself up, and you on your part *would* do the same, then the vicious circle would be broken. Society would become mutually [ethically and lovingly] supportive, rather than self-destructive. Count on God to look out for you, to provide people that will care for you, and listen to him when he calls on you to provide for them. (pp. 15-16, emphasis in original).

Considering our foregoing thoughts in relation to Robinson's observation, noting that Jefferson explicitly chose to include the Golden Rule in his revision of the Gospels, there is a way to interpret this rule or precept as intimating and so functioning as an ethical test of sorts, and this type of test is certainly not uncommon to varying views of morality, e.g., as is well-known, Kant incorporates into his *deontology* the Categorical Imperative to serve as the maxim for one's moral behavior, asking, can we universalize this maxim? What would happen *if* everyone behaved in such a way, *if* one chose to either do or refrain from doing x, y, or z? Based on our analysis, it is argued that the Golden Rule has a similar, albeit not identical, function within Jesus' ethics, which we explore in detail below, especially when considering the notions of human *fragility* and sense of human *dignity* that Jesus embraces within his teachings, which is drawn from and dependent on his love of God and God's love for humanity. In their analysis of various ethical systems, Pojman and Fieser (2009) argue that what lies at the heart of any form of legitimate moral philosophizing is a view of the human that undeniably *should* include: The acceptance that each person is vulnerable to instances of pain and suffering, and that each person possesses an innate sense of "dignity and profound worth, which entails that he or she must never be exploited or manipulated or merely used as a means to our idea of what is for the general good (or any other end)" (p. 134). This crucial issue of *human dignity* is often overlooked by scholars analyzing the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, attention to this issue will enhance the view of ethics we are developing in relation to Jesus.

Jesus welcomes and embraces all people he encounters because they possess dignity. They are never treated by Jesus in a manner that would suggest that they merely possess *conditional* worth, and this is strikingly evident in his compassionate treatment of sinners and the lame and sick, his acceptance and inclusion of the marginalized within his



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

peripatetic ministry. To concretize this notion of ethics embracing human dignity, consider Jesus' questioning and overturning of the rabbinic Law that prohibits working on the Sabbath. For Jesus, it is the embrace of and respect for the sense of human dignity that empowers him to declare with confidence and authority that the Sabbath is in all actuality made for the human and not the reverse, and this is why he heals, gathers food, and performs good deeds, even on that high holy day. To stress this point, Jesus declares that the Sabbath was in fact made for and stands in service of Adam and Eve (Matt. 12:1-8), hence reinterpreting "the creation story by giving humankind dominion over, not only the creation, but also over the institution of the sabbath," and also over the religious rituals "most widely practiced by Judeans" (Funk and Hoover, 1993, p. 288). His instructive comparison and contrast between the inherent worth of an animal and human speaks directly to this issue of human dignity. "Which of you," asks Jesus, "shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightaway pull him out on the sabbath day" (Jefferson, 2007, p. 56). To our point, Jesus asks us to consider how love, care, and concern is necessitated by the human being possessing inherent dignity. God's love embraces and nurtures this sense of dignity in and through His unconditional love, which God bestows on humanity, and in return, Jesus teaches that we *should* bestow this love on others, and all humankind is worthy of that love because of their dignity as children of God.

Nielsen (1992) claims that we do not require definitive ethical rules or principles that have been codified and objectified, from which to determine what behaviors *should be* prescribed or proscribed. His argument is that ethics need not begin with indelible, categorical principles, but with the general assumption that certain things are desirable (valuable) and others are never desirable (unvaluable), and when beginning from the general "moral impression" that human dignity is ultimately valuable, he concludes that such things as self-awareness and self-fulfillment, recognition of both the vulnerability and worth of others and the care thereof, are fundamental human "goods" that *should* and *ought* to be cherished, sheltered, and nurtured, forming a basis, offering a criterion from which to begin to consider ethical precepts. Nielsen admits that this initial "general (ethical) assumption" is impossible to prove in an objective manner, but he claims we can, through our interaction with others and by means of active reflection and dialogue, through what we have termed *sympathetic consensus*, "see that in [our] behavior [we] clearly show that [we] can subscribe to such a principle" (pp. 122-123).¹⁶ Although Nielsen does not formalize this *normative* notion, our acceptance of this unwritten grounding and guiding principle that his position requires, in terms of a "general (ethical) assumption," is also dependent on what Jesus and many others in the parables seem to possess, namely, an innate "moral sense". In essence, such a view hinges on the ability, as the internal is related to the external, to feel, sense, and judge (determine) what *ought* to be done. Jaspers (1967) suggests just such a position, indeed, the type of ethical transformation that we have argued Jesus requires of his followers, which Jaspers calls the *state of beatitude*, "cannot be demonstrated by miracles or by scripture...but is its own proof...Its proofs are the inner lights, feelings of pleasure and self-satisfaction" (p. 75).

Cupitt (2009) also believes that Jesus' ethics works in part by "appealing to our human 'social affections', feelings of the heart, sympathy, benevolence, and so forth," and unfortunately, as Cupitt laments, those adopting this philosophical view are far too often erroneously, "dismissed as sentimentalists" (p. 19). In relation to this point, the embrace of *objectivist ethics* persists, which harbors the belief that *if* morality is not objective, unchanging, in the style of religious ethics as discussed, *then* it necessarily devolves into relativism, or worse, nihilism. Cupitt, as we have stated, views Jesus as the historical precursor of "our radical humanist ethic, our 'subjectivism,' our emotivism," and when speaking of *subjectivism* and *emotivism* in this context, we note that Cupitt is not referencing "subjectivists, who define the rightness

¹⁶ Lamont (2013), a *philosophical humanist*, uses a similar argument from "intuition" when arguing for the existence of freewill, an intuition that is "as strong...as the sensation of pleasure or pain," and so forceful is this intuition that "the burden of proof is on the determinist to show that it is based on an illusion" (p. 366). Applying Lamont's line of reasoning to the argument for the existence and legitimacy of the human's "moral sense," it is possible to state that the burden of proof is on the skeptic, the objectivist, or the nihilist to show that the our perception and intuition of the *moral sense* is reducible to mere illusion.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

of actions and 'goodness of ends' in terms of [merely] the feelings of approval they elicit," neither is he embracing the understanding of the type of "emotivism" of which the logical positivist Ayer (2001) is highly critical. For Ayer argued that ethical expressions and judgments, expressed through "meaningless" locutions, serve no other purpose than to express "feelings about certain objects [or states of being], but make no factual [and indeed no ethical] assertion about them" (p. 111). Instead, although not developing this line of reasoning, Cupitt intimates an understanding of emotivism found in the ethical philosophy of Findlay (1970), who argues: "The emotivist analysis may have this amount of truth that it is only in feeling [ethical values], in being actually drawn to them, that we can fulfil or realize our understanding of what [ethical] values are" (p. 80).¹⁷ They can never be gleaned *a priori* or understood at an objective distance (*sub specie aeternitatis*), defined and classified employing a framework of detached argumentation, instead "they must be experienced as making an actual impression on us for them to be fully there for us at all" (p. 80).

It is possible, Findlay argues, to philosophically produce a legitimate ethical analysis that frames an "indirect characterization" of such values. Findlay stresses that the inability to produce a definitive, objectively universalizable categorization of ethical values, an issue we related to Nielsen's philosophy, does not indicate that we cannot "attribute such values," as experienced, "pinned down," and then related and "characterized to the framework of the universe" (p. 80). Robinson (1967), in direct relation to our analysis of the philosophy of Jesus, contends that the ethics of *agapism*, and the idea of "moral sense" discussed, makes reference to "practical reckoning" in ethics, which occurs and is experienced, "only by a moral agent, a moral conscience, *a conscience*, and all the more readily by one who has grown in grace and on the knowledge of God" (p. 87, emphasis added). In Noonan's (2007) reading of Hume and the sentimentalists, he argues that "sympathy converts ideas into impressions and hence the ideas of others' passions into the passion themselves,"¹⁸ and since humans relate to other humans, it is possible to develop and "achieve a general view from which moral judgments can be made" (p. 146). This offers a "principle of consistency," or the potential for the universalization (*trans-subjectification*) of our ethical principles or precepts as related to Jesus - again, consensus born of sympathetic agreement - indicating that such precepts or general assumptions about morality, born of our *moral sense* or intuition, might be said to apply to all individuals in similar circumstances and situations. We note, as related directly to our analysis, Pojman and Fieser (2009) argue emphatically: "If one judges that *x* is right [ethical] for a certain person *p*, then it is right [ethical] for any relevantly similar to *p*," and they go on to add that this trait of ethical principles, in direct relation to our analysis, "is exemplified in the Golden Rule" (p. 167).

¹⁷ Speaking to the crucial distinction between normative statements and propositions, recognizing the inherent limitations of both forms of expression, Findlay (1970) claims that "there really is, *it would seem*, an organized framework of [ethical] values and disvalues within which our practical decisions must be made, and philosophy must give some account of the structure of this framework and of the [ethical] principles guiding its construction" (p. 90). Although space does not allow for a more detailed analysis drawing out technical distinctions between what we have called "moral intuition" and "moral sense," it suffices to inform the reader that what we are philosophizing can be, as it is by Hudson (1967), related to an expression of "conscience" in the early philosophy of preacher Joseph Butler who was influenced by both "the rational intuitionists and the 'moral sense' school," [and] speaks of our moral understanding and moral sense...whether called conscience, moral reason, moral sense, or divine reason; whether considered as a sentiment of the understanding, or as a perception of the heart" (pp. 129-132). In addition, as related to our important discussion of ethical character development (*moral progress*), Hudson does not deny that "conscience may need to be developed or enlightened, and that it can be perverted" (p. 132).

¹⁸ We must note that Findlay (1970), as we have referenced above, in his vision of "axiological ethics," also focuses on *sympathy* as a key to experiencing and establishing ethical values: All of our encounters with the world (nature) and others contain an undeniable exterior and interior aspect, and "through sympathy, which is not necessarily based on one's own personal experiences, one enters into the not straightforwardly observable inner life of others, which always has a necessary place in our world, though the precise content may be filled in, often with grave need of correction, by experience, imagination or inference" (p. 82).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

To conclude this discussion of our inherent *moral sense* and the potential for ethics to rise to the level of *trans-subjective* legitimation through consensus, we bring the reader's attention to two illuminating examples from the Gospels where such an intuitive understanding of morality, in terms of "moral sense," "practical reckoning," "moral conscience," is at work: First, we turn to group of sayings that are grounded in the mode of the interrogative, appearing in both *Matthew* and *Luke*, and although these queries of Jesus might appear obvious and trite, they are nevertheless in search of a response that clearly draws from because it awakens the listener's internal sense of what is ethically right, what *should be* done in these specific circumstances: "Which of you fathers would hand his son a snake when it's a fish he's asking for? Who among you would hand a son a stone when it's bread he's asking for? Or a scorpion when it's an egg he's asking for (Luke 11:9-12; Matt 7:9-10)? Second, let us consider the instance of a friend arriving in the middle of the night at our house at an inopportune moment, asking for a favor. Jesus asks us to consider what is at stake if we flatly refuse the friend's request and abruptly turn him away. For Jesus, this is the recognition that such an act of refusal would bring shame and weigh heavy on one's moral conscience, indeed, Jesus observes that we *should* "give the other whatever is needed because [we'd] be ashamed not to" (Luke 11:5-8). Undoubtedly, these passages are driven by Jesus' use of rhetorical irony and hyperbolic comparison, but importantly, related to our concerns, all of these situations are testable according to the Golden Rule, and all depend on the hearer drawing on his or her internal and intuitive sense of the ethical: Who would want x when one is asking for y? Would you want to find yourself in this situation? Would you do such thing to others? Jesus wants us to consider such pressing queries, embracing the Golden Rule, when thinking, deliberating, judging, and ultimately choosing, because we are ethically inspired, the appropriate and ethical response. It would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to find any person to respond in the affirmative when confronted with question of whether he would offer a person a cold stone in place of the warm bread that a hungry person requests. Here, Jesus believes that hearers can arrive at a sense of agreement on the matter regarding what ethically *should* be done in such circumstances.

Based on our analysis, it is clear that Jesus advocates for vigorous self-reflection, turning inside to honestly determine the ethicality of one's character leading to action, and then assessing when and why changes to one's behavior is required. This understanding is expressed within the *sermon on the mount* when Jesus speaks about the rash and inappropriate judgment of others, "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Jefferson, 2007, p. 26). Here, we encounter what has been discussed regarding motive, character, and the potential for ethical progress, for it is the case that Jesus is instructing judgmental individuals to assess the state of their soul's development, to search out and identify any potential ethical shortcomings, and then to take appropriate corrective actions in response. This we relate directly to Jefferson's remarks concerning the *doctrine of a future state* as it is bound up with Jesus' ethics. Following Jefferson, if, as we have done, disregard the talk of (futural) religious eschatology, it is possible to understand that Jefferson might be intimating the human potential for the type of *horizontal* transcendence discussed, or the propensity for the futural moral transformation of one's character, in terms consistent with the type of philosophical soul-searching/building occurring in the company of others that is necessary for erecting, fostering, and nurturing a flourishing and developing ethical community. This view is discussed by Tatum (1982), who argues that it is possible that "Jesus' basic objective was the transformation of the human heart although he may have desired all society to be increasingly brought under the rule of God," i.e., a futural ecumenical community brought together and united through the love of God, self, and others (p. 139). We relate this line of thought to an issue discussed earlier, that of Jesus' urging his followers to become like children, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Jefferson, 2007, p. 45). (Mark 10:15; John 3:3)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

CONCLUDING REMARKS: IN PURSUIT OF JESUS' INCOMPLETE ETHICAL PROJECT

It is possible to draw at least three key components from our reading that characterizes the philosophy of Jesus as they emerge from *The Jefferson Bible*. (1) Jesus stresses that a change to one's ethical disposition is necessary, and we can affect this change or transformation through self-reflection and our interaction with others, highlighted above all by the love we give and receive under God's watch and care; (2) Jesus insists that we must adopt a resolute openness to and receptivity for our self-transformation in love, we must like children recover a lost sense of innocence, releasing ourselves over to the potential for *new beginnings*, embracing the potential of *natality*,¹⁹ for our continued ethical development (*progress*) is always on the approach as futural potential; and (3) Jesus embraces an undeniable spiritual element that is expressed through his philosophy and pedagogy, but it need not be thought of in terms of the drive for otherworldly transcendence or salvation, and instead might be related to a deep and pressing concern for our worldly relations as these are penetrated, enhanced, and sustained by God's all-encompassing love. Jesus says: "No man putteth new wine into old [skins]; else the new wine will burst the [skins], to be spilled and the [skins] shall perish...new wine must be put into new [skins]; and both are preserved" (Jefferson 2007, p. 42). (Matt 9:16-17; Luke 5:36-38; Mark 2:20) This relates to the radical change to our soul and disposition required by Jesus, which demands the deconstruction, criticism, and when necessary, the rejection of unexamined beliefs previously held, and through that arduous process, the potential exists for a new and transformed self to emerge. Jesus calls us to shed our old skin, to reject and discard our old ways. For the new self that now lives in the loving light of God and loving presence of our neighbors and brethren, is utterly incompatible with the old self that must die in order for the new self to be re-born, to live - *let the dead bury the dead!*

Much like Jefferson (2007), we recognize the perennial nature of Jesus' ethical teaching, and this represents the drive for a better world, which is expressive of the epochal appeal and persistence of Jesus' philosophy. We agree with Jefferson's sentiments: "The true style and spirit of the rich fragments [Jesus] left us [represent] the most perfect and sublime [ethics] that has ever been taught by man" (p. 10). The view of Jesus' ethical philosophy that emerges from our reading of *The Jefferson Bible* stands in stark contrast with the conception of Jesus' moral views found in Niebuhr's (1963) elucidation of Christian ethics, which has only a vertical dimension and is unable to, "deal at all with the immediate moral problem of every human life" (P. 23). Jesus' ethics "may offer valuable insights to and sources of criticism for a prudent social ethic which deals with present realities; but no such [*horizontal*] social ethic can be directly derived from a pure religious ethic" (p. 24). Despite Niebuhr's claim that it is near impossible to derive either a theoretical or practical ethics from the religious philosophy of Jesus, Hoover (2002) urges that we should not shy away from the worthwhile task of attempting to interpret and understand the relationship between Christian theology and ethics, which, he insists needs to be "acknowledged, not explained away" (p. 56). Jesus' vision and project, Hoover argues, is an instance of a "theologically, socially, economically, and politically unfinished work" (p. 61). Hoover's conclusion serves as an invitation to complete this work, with the following caveat and supreme understanding of the responsibility entailed when attempting such a challenging interpretive endeavor, for "every interpreter will be held accountable for the perspicacity and pertinence of his or her thought and judgment," answering for "the fitness and quality of what he or she constructs" (pp. 61-62).

We conclude by relating to what Jaspers (1954) says about all great philosophy to our characterization of Jesus, and observe that Jesus lived his life beholden to what Jaspers terms, as an homage to Kant, the *unconditional imperative*,

¹⁹ "Natality" is the neologism Arendt (2018) employs to indicate the human's ontological potential for "new beginnings," or the potential for transcendence in knowledge and learning, the open possibility to continue to grow as a person and continually, in an ever-renewed fashion, become "new" to oneself. Dolan (2004) observes that it is interesting that Arendt, "a Jew, nevertheless credits Christianity with the greatest expression of natality" (p. 606).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

which is ultimately expressive, we argue, of the love of God and neighbor. This notion is born of Jaspers' understanding of the religious mode or dimension of *Existenz*, expressed in terms of the Comprehensive consciousness of God in "faith and obedience" (p. 46). When dedicated and beholden to living in the light and under the burdensome responsibility of the *unconditional imperative*, "our empirical existence becomes in a sense the raw material of the idea, of love, of loyalty" (p. 52). To dedicate one's life to the *unconditional imperative*, as did Jesus, is to steadfastly remain "loyal where disloyalty would have destroyed everything" (p. 53). Adherence to this type of imperative, is difficult indeed, but as Jesus teaches, the way to truth always goes and treads the narrow and potentially hazardous way, but amid the danger, as Heidegger (1977), referencing the German poet Hölderlin recognizes, "*grows the saving power also*" (p. 28. emphasis in original). (Matt 7:13-14; John 14:6)

WORKS CITED

- Arendt, H. (2018). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Aristotle (1999). *Nicomachean ethics*, trans. T. Irwin. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Ayer, A. J. (2001). *Language, truth, and logic*. London: Penguin Books.
- Borg, M. (2001). *Meeting Jesus for the first time: The historical Jesus and the heart of contemporary faith*. San Francisco: HarperOne.
- Borg, M. (2002). "Jesus: A sketch," in: R. W. Hoover, ed. *Profiles of Jesus*. Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, pp. 129-136.
- Corely, K. E. (2002). "Gender and Class in the teachings of Jesus," in: R. W. Hoover, ed. *Profiles of Jesus*. Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, pp. 137-159.
- Crossan, J., D. (1992). *In parables: The challenge of the historical Jesus*. New York: Polebridge Press.
- Cupitt, D. (2006). *Radical theology*. Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press.
- Cupitt, D. (2009). *Jesus and philosophy*. UK: SCM Press.
- Dodd, C. H. (1961). *The parables of the kingdom*. New York: Charles Scriber's Sons.
- Dolan, F. M. (2004). "An ambiguous citation in Hannah Arendt's *the human condition*," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 66, No. 2, pp. 606-610.
- Findlay, J. N. (1970). *Axiological ethics*. UK: St. Martin's Press.
- Fortna, R. T. (2002). "The Gospel of John and the historical Jesus," in: R. W. Hoover, ed. *Profiles of Jesus*. Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, pp. 223-229.
- Funk, R. W. (2002). "Jesus; A voice print," in: in: R. W. Hoover, ed. *Profiles of Jesus*. Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, pp. 9-14.
- Funk, R. W. and Dewey, A. J. (2016). *The gospel of Jesus: According to the Jesus seminar. Salem: Polebridge Press*.
- Funk, R. W. and Hoover, R. W. (1993). *The search for the authentic words of Jesus: The Five Gospels*. New York: Macmillan Publishing.
- Funk, R.W., Scott B. B., and Butts J. R. (1988). *The parables of Jesus: Red letter edition*. Sonoma: Polebridge Press.
- Hoover, R. W. (2002). "The Jesus of history: A vision of the good life," in: R. W. Hoover, ed. *Profiles of Jesus*. Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, pp. 41-64.
- Hedrick, C. W. (2002). "Jesus of Nazareth: A profile under construction," in: R. W. Hoover, ed. *Profiles of Jesus*. Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, pp. 65-72.
- Heidegger, M. (1977). *The question concerning technology and other essays*, trans., W.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

- Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row.
- Hudson, H. D. (1967). *Ethical intuitionism*. UK: St. Martin's Press.
- Jaspers, K. (1954). *Way to wisdom*, trans., R. Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Jaspers, K. (1967). *Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus*, trans., R. Manheim. San Diego: Harvest Books.
- Jefferson, T. (2007). *The Jefferson bible: The life and morals of Jesus of Nazareth*. Radford: Wilder Publishers.
- Kant, I. (1958). *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*, trans., H. J. Paton. New York: Harper & Row.
- Lamont, C. (2013). "Freedom of the will and human responsibility," in: L. P. Pojman *Philosophy: Quest for truth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 365-368.
- Magrini, J. M. (2017). *Plato's Socrates at the limit of education: A curriculum grounded in finite human transcendence*. New York: Routledge.
- Magrini, J. M. (2018). *Plato's Socrates: Philosophy and education*. Cham: Springer Press.
- Magrini, J. M. (2021). *The politics of the soul in the Alcibiades I*. New York: Peter Lang Press.
- Niebuhr, R. (1963). *An interpretation of Christian ethics*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Nielsen, K. (1990). *Ethics without God*. New York: Prometheus Books.
- Noonan, H. (2007). *Hume*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
- Pojman, L. P. and Fieser, J. (2009). *Ethics: Discovering right and wrong*. UK: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Robinson, J. M. (2002). "What Jesus had to say," in: R. W. Hoover, ed. *Profiles of Jesus*. Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, pp.15-18.
- Robinson, N. H. G. "Agape and Agapism," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 13(2), 1967, 79.
- Rollston, C. (2020). "Jefferson's Jesus: Gospel texts that are absent," *Huffington Post*, [2.https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jeffersons-jesus-the-jefferson-bible-part-i-gospel_b_59ff753ae4b0d467d4c2262e](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jeffersons-jesus-the-jefferson-bible-part-i-gospel_b_59ff753ae4b0d467d4c2262e). Retrieved: 1/19/23.
- Sallis, J. (1989). *Being and logos*. Bloomington: Indiana State University.
- Sanders, E. P. (1993). *The historical figure of Jesus*. UK: Penguin Group.
- Scott, B. B. (2001). *Re-imagining the world: Introduction to the parables of Jesus*. (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press).
- Scott, B. B. (2002). "The reappearance of the parables," in: R. W. Hoover, ed. *Profiles of Jesus*. Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, pp. 19-40.
- Selsam, H. (1965). *Ethics and progress: New values in a revolutionary world*. New York: International Press.
- Sheehan, T. (1986). *The first coming: How the kingdom of God became Christianity*. New York: Random House.
- Tatum, W. B. (1982). *In quest of Jesus*. Atlanta: John Knox Press.



THE HEBREW GOSPEL IN THE HEBREW SCRIPT: FOURTH-CENTURY INTERPRETATION OF *HEBRAIDI DIALEKTO* AS ALPHABET

Jordan Lavender, Ph.D.

(Millbury, Massachusetts, USA)

Correspondence should be addressed to: jordan.lavender@ncis.org

Date submitted: 26 March 2023

Accepted following revisions: 25 August 2023

First published on line 28 August 2023

Abstract

Various early Church Fathers reference a Gospel written in "Hebraidi dialekto [Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ]" which has been interpreted as referring to either a Gospel written in the Hebrew or Aramaic language, or even in a uniquely Jewish way of speaking ancient Greek. This analysis considers previous work on understanding both of these words, in addition to applying concepts from modern linguistics, to understand the nature of what the early Church Fathers were claiming about the earliest sources of Christian literature. This paper proposes that the Greek phrase "Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ" came to be interpreted as referring to either a Hebrew or Aramaic document written in the Hebrew block script, as opposed to the older paleo-Hebrew script, which was regarded as having both claims to antiquity and a higher degree of sacrality.

Keywords: Hebrew Gospel; bilingualism; linguistic variation; early Church Fathers



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

INTRODUCTION

Behind the Synoptic problem and in studies to understand the historical Jesus is a problem of language.¹ It is generally understood that Jesus was a multilingual person² in a multilingual society,³ in which Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek⁴ existed in a diglossic relationship. This refers to two varieties of the same language, such as classical Arabic and its dialectal forms, which have different purposes in society and in people's interactions with others so that each language has a defined role in society.⁵ While there has been intense debate about the use of each of these languages in Greco-Roman Palestine, most scholars support the notion that Aramaic was the common vernacular at the time.⁶ If Aramaic was perhaps not used in writing, but used together with Hebrew as Semitic vernaculars,⁷ then Jesus would have taught and spoken Aramaic on a day-to-day basis and would have taught in that language. Even if Hebrew were a vernacular, as some have argued,⁸ positing that Aramaic was used by upper classes and Hebrew by lower classes,⁹ a problem still remains. How did the Semitic teaching of Jesus go from oral form in Aramaic or Hebrew to its written form in Greek?

This problem was felt by the Church Fathers, who maintained a tradition that the Gospel of Matthew, in particular, was originally written in Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ (*Hebraidi dialektō*). That is, that the sayings of Jesus were originally recorded in a Semitic language *before* being translated into Greek, at some point at the end of the first century CE. A relatively small group of scholars have proposed that Jesus spoke and taught in Greek.¹⁰ Even so, the tradition of an early version of the Gospel in Hebrew exists among the Church Fathers and persists from the earliest records of Christian writing in the second century to the ascent of Christianity to become the imperial religion in the fourth century.

This tradition is separate and distinct from the known phenomenon of individual Gospel texts associated with Jewish Christian groups. There are known to have been three such documents: The Gospel of the Hebrews, the Gospel of the Ebionites and the Gospel of the Nazoraeans.¹¹ The terminology is somewhat confusing in that Papias seems to refer to

¹ The Synoptic problem refers to the three canonical Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, referred to as *synoptic* because of the literary relationship among these texts. There is quite a bit of overlap in their material which can be seen in a parallel presentation of each Gospel and its contents.

² Porter, S. E. (2004). Criteria for authenticity in historical-Jesus research. *Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research*, 1-306.

³ Rydbeck, L. (1998). The Language of the New Testament. *Tyndale Bulletin*, 49, 361-368; James, J. C. (1920). *The Language of Palestine and Adjacent Regions*. T. & T. Clark; Porter, S.E. (2003). Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament with Reference to Tense and Voice. *Studies in Biblical Greek I*; 111-56; Porter, S. E. (1991). Introduction. The Greek of the New Testament as a Disputed Area of Research. *The language of the New Testament*, 11-38.

⁴ Gundry, R. H. (1964). The language milieu of first-century Palestine: its bearing on the authenticity of the gospel tradition. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 83(4), p. 405.

⁵ Ferguson, C. A. (1959). Diglossia. *Word*, 15(2), 325-340; Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies* (No. 1). Cambridge University Press.

⁶ Bock, D. L. (2002). *Studying the historical Jesus: A guide to sources and methods*. Baker Academic.

⁷ Birkeland, H. (1954). *The Language of Jesus*. Oslo: Jacob Dybward, p. 11, 39

⁸ Segal, M. H. (2001). *A grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew*. Wipf and Stock Publishers; Rabin, C. (1958). The historical background of Qumran Hebrew. *ScrHier* 4, 144-161.

⁹ Segal, M. H. (1908). Mishnaic Hebrew and its relation to Biblical Hebrew and to Aramaic. *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 647-737.

¹⁰ Porter, S. E. (1993). Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek? *Tyndale Bulletin*, 44, 199-235.

¹¹ Ehrman and Plese (p. 100) note that Jerome and Eusebius explicitly refer to an Aramaic document, whereas most Church Fathers did not read Semitic languages, presuming a version of those documents existing in Greek. They divide the quotations related to these texts into three groups. One is found in Origen, Eusebius and Jerome involving quotations closely aligned to Matthew and coming from a Semitic document. The second group consists of Alexandrian authors (Clement, Origen and Didymus the Blind) who have no relation to Matthew and derive from a Greek source. A third group of quotations found in Epiphanius seem to come from a different gospel harmony. The first group is proposed to be a Semitic version of Matthew, which was



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

the Hebrew version of Matthew as the “Gospel of the Hebrews” and the latter document, the Gospel of the Nazoraeans, is sometimes referred to as the “Gospel of the Hebrews.” In any case, the first two of these non-canonical Gospels were written in Greek; according to Jerome, the latter was composed in Aramaic.

I have specifically used the phrasing *Semitic language* because the phrase Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ (*Hebraïdi dialektō*) is ambiguous; it is not clear what *Hebraïdi* means nor what a *dialektos* is. This had led some scholars to propose that *Hebraïdi* could have referred to either Hebrew or Aramaic; in fact, interpreting this as referring to Aramaic is probably the more common option. Maurice Casey is perhaps the strongest advocate for an Aramaic original source for both Mark¹² and the Q sayings tradition, meaning that these texts were originally written in Aramaic and subsequently translated into Greek.¹³ Behind Casey’s proposals for an Aramaic source for much of the Gospel tradition is the assertion that Jesus taught in Aramaic, a proposition that, although widely accepted, has not been universally accepted by scholars. Casey proposes that, behind both Mark and Q, there is an Aramaic source that can be reconstructed through careful analysis of the current Greek text, which he proposes was translated directly from the Semitic source. Others have proposed similar ideas but with a Hebrew original instead of an Aramaic source.¹⁴ James Edwards is perhaps the most known advocate of a Hebrew *ur*-gospel. Edwards claims that the original Hebrew source is behind the Jewish Christian Gospel(s) and the special material of Luke (called L in the multiple source theory).¹⁵ Edwards’ theory, in particular, relies on a literal reading of the relevant material in the Church Fathers’ writings about the origin of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew or Aramaic.

This paper compares analyses of the words *Hebraïdi dialektos* to explore how this phrase was understood by the fourth-century Christian authors who mention this tradition about a Gospel being composed in Hebrew. This is accomplished through a close analysis of the writings of Jerome and Epiphanius in particular, with previous analyses of both Greek words and a theoretical background in modern sociolinguistic research into bilingualism and multilingualism. By examining how the words *Hebraïdis* and *dialektos* were used by authors in antiquity, we can firmly establish that the reference is most likely referring to composition in the Hebrew language, although the word *dialektos* is quite ambiguous and could point to a Jewish variety of Greek. Inscription evidence from the period suggests that Aramaic was not used in religious compositions and was used for more mundane, vernacular purposes, pointing away from Aramaic as the source of the composition. However, since no text survives, the question is ultimately unanswerable. This shifts our focus from uncovering something that was lost to understanding how the Hebrew Gospel served an interpretive function for the growing Christian community, particularly the proto-orthodox faction, which sought to establish its dominance over other varieties of Christianity in existence up until the fifth century. This research suggests that the tradition of the origins of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew were invented to lend credibility to the growing Christian movement and to perpetuate its claims to authenticity and antiquity as a religious movement.

geographically located in Berea and Aleppo Syria; the second is thought to be the so-called Gospel according to the Hebrews, written in Greek and found among Jewish Christians in Egypt; the third is said to be the Gospel of the Ebionites, a Greek gospel harmony used among Christians in the East of the Jordan River, reported by Epiphanius; Ehrman, B. and Z. Plese. (2013).

¹² Casey, M. (1999). *Aramaic sources of Mark’s Gospel* (Vol. 102). Cambridge University Press.; Casey, M. (2002). *An Aramaic approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (Vol. 122). Cambridge University Press.

¹³ Referring to a hypothetical source text for the common sayings of Jesus found between Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark.

¹⁴ Carmignac, J. (1987). *The Birth of the Synoptics*. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press; Van Cangh, J. (2005). *L’Evangile de Marc : un original hébreu?* Bruxelles: Editions Safran.

¹⁵ The term “L Source” is used in the multiple source theory to explain the literary relationships among the canonical Gospels. Both Matthew and Luke copy from Mark, incorporating most of Mark in their own works. Matthew and Luke additionally share a large body of sayings material called the Q (from the German *Quelle*, ‘source’). However, both Matthew and Luke incorporate their own unique material called “M” and “L” respectively; c.f. Edwards, J. (2009). *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

CONCEPTS IN MODERN LINGUISTICS

One of the many subfields within the broader discipline of sociolinguistics seeks to understand how and why bilingual speakers use multiple languages. These theoretical assumptions will here be maintained to analyze historical text. One of the key assumptions of sociolinguistic research is that language has always exhibited the same properties throughout time, meaning that the principles that describe modern speakers of multiple languages will also be applicable to ancient speakers of multiple languages.

The nature of the topic of analysis leads to a consideration of multilingualism from a sociolinguistic point of view. Multilingualism does not fit one simple pattern in a community. Speakers may be proficient in grammar and pronunciation but lack literacy, or there could be lexical gaps in a speaker's communicative competency in one of their languages, or bilingual speakers may have communicative competence but lack full control over their use of forms.¹⁶ One important pattern of multilingualism to note here is *diglossia*.¹⁷ a superposed 'high' language and another 'low' variety. Diglossia is relatively *stable*, meaning the role of each language is not subject to much social change. The *high* language is usually a standardized variety with a body of literature and taught in formal education, but not used in regular conversation.¹⁸ Diglossia is classified as either *classical* or *extended*, with the former referring to varieties of the same linguistic family (Modern Standard Arabic vs. Arabic dialects) and the latter referring to those cases where unrelated languages existed in high and low varieties according to domain.¹⁹ In diglossia, the high and low languages have functional purposes in normal interactions in society. One is usually written and formal and the other vernacular, oral, and informal. The different ways that languages are used in these contexts is called *domains*, "an abstraction which refers to a sphere of activity representing a combination of specific times, settings and role relationships."²⁰ Common domains can be family, friendships, religion, employment, and education, and each domain may invoke the use of one language or another in a bilingual speaker's mind.²¹ There is usually a one-to-one relationship between language choice and social context, so that each variety can be seen as having a distinct place or function within the local speech repertoire. In such cases, language selection tends to be socially stable and speakers know these unwritten rules and only use one language in a given situation. Other factors such as discourse function, where some topics are better handled in one language than another because either the speaker might be competent in discussing a certain topic in only one of the languages or one language might lack the necessary vocabulary for a given topic.²² Speakers also take into account their audience's language preference and proficiency, as well as ethnolinguistic identification.²³

¹⁶ Myers-Scotton, C. (1990). Suzanne Romaine, Bilingualism. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. Pp. 337. *Language in Society*, 19(4), 557-561.

¹⁷ Ferguson, C. A. (1959). Diglossia. *word*, 15(2), 325-340; Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies* (No. 1). Cambridge University Press.

¹⁸ Fishman, J. *Sociolinguistics*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House (1971), p. 16.

¹⁹ Fishman, J. (1980). Bilingualism and biculturalism as individual and societal phenomena. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1(1), 3- 15. doi:10.1080/01434632.1980.9993995

²⁰ Fishman, Joshua A. and Cooper, Robert Leon. and Newman, Roxana Ma. *Bilingualism in the barrio* [by] Joshua A. Fishman, Robert L. Cooper, Roxana Ma, et al/Indiana University Bloomington 1971, p. 29.

²¹ Hoffman G (1971) Puerto Ricans in New York: A language-related ethnographic summary. In Fishman J, Cooper R and Ma R (eds), *Bilingualism in the Barrio*, p. 29.

²² Fishman, J. A. (2020). Who speaks what language to whom and when? In *The bilingualism reader* (pp. 55-70). Routledge.

²³ Hamers, J., & Blanc, M. (2000). *Bilinguality and Bilingualism* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511605796, p. 253.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Other salient features of multilingualism are the use of both languages in the same discourse, called *code switching* and linguistic borrowing, the incorporation of elements of one language in another.²⁴ There are different ways that speakers borrow words from one language or another and how they use code switching in their discourse. There are also different linguistic types of code switching with different properties associated with them.²⁵

Identity is a key issue in multilingualism and often reflects the linguistic policies of a place. Speakers can demonstrate their own linguistic, social, and cultural knowledge through their use of language, as well as their socioeconomic status and social standing.²⁶ Speakers might also use language to express their own identity.²⁷

Newer understandings of how languages are used and function question some of the structuralist assumptions of previous research, which considered “languages” as discrete units. This skepticism has led to a new theoretical orientation in understanding multilingualism, which comes under many names. I rely on the concept of *polylinguaging*²⁸ to describe this theoretical orientation. This refers to the use of “features” associated with different “languages” even when speakers purportedly only know features associated with one of those languages. This theoretical background focuses on the use of languages and not languages as static systems.²⁹ The benefit of this approach is that we can postulate that speakers can learn a number of “features” and assemble them together into one *linguistic repertoire*, but a speaker need not acquire an entire language system in order to use the features associated with that language in a socially appropriate way. This research was born out of the unique circumstances of the twenty-first century and the experience of language use on social media. However, the principles have been applied to other uses of language both historically and in other contemporary contexts. The features associated with language can refer to many aspects of language use, for example, in certain Romance languages, there is a politeness factor with second person address (*tu vs vous* in French, Spanish, Italian, etc.).

²⁴ Grosjean, F. (1982). *Life with two languages: An introduction to bilingualism*. Harvard University Press.

²⁵ For a sociolinguistic understanding of code switching, the work of Shana Poplack is highly recommended: Poplack, S. (1978). Syntactic structure and social function of code-switching, vol. 2. *Centro de Estudios Puertorriquenos, [City University of New York]*; Poplack, S. (2013). “Sometimes I’ll start a sentence in Spanish Y TERMINO EN ESPAÑOL”: Toward a typology of code-switching. *Linguistics*, 51(s1), 11-14; Poplack, S. (1988). Contrasting patterns of code-switching in two communities. *Codeswitching: Anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives*, 48, 215-244; Poplack, S. and D. Sankoff. (1984). Borrowing: the synchrony of integration. *Linguistics* 22.99-135; Poplack, S., D. Sankoff, & C. Miller. (1988). The social correlates and linguistic processes of lexical borrowing and assimilation. *Linguistics*, 26(1). 47-104; Poplack, S., & Meechan, M. (1995). Patterns of language mixture: Nominal structure in Wolof-French and Fongbe-French bilingual discourse. *One speaker, two languages*, 199-232; Poplack, S., & Levey, S. (2010). Contact-induced grammatical change: A cautionary tale. *Language and space: An international handbook of linguistic variation*, 1, 391-419; Poplack, Shana, David Sankoff and Christopher Miller. 1988. The social correlates and linguistic processes of lexical borrowing and assimilation. *Linguistics* 26. 47-104; Poplack, S, L. Zentz, and N. Dion. (2012). What counts as (contact-induced) change? *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 15(2). 247-254.

²⁶ Heller, M. (1995), Language, Minority Education and Gender Linking Social Justice and Power. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 5: 105-106. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.1995.5.1.105>; Heller, M. (2007). Bilingualism as Ideology and Practice. In: Heller, M. (eds) *Bilingualism: A Social Approach*. Palgrave Advances in Linguistics. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230596047_1

²⁷ Sebba, M., Mahootian, S., & Jonsson, C. (Eds.). (2012). *Language mixing and code-switching in writing: Approaches to mixed-language written discourse*. Routledge.

²⁸ Jørgensen, J. N., Karrebæk, M. S., Madsen, L. M., & Møller, J. S. (2015). Polylinguaging in superdiversity. In *Language and superdiversity* (pp. 147-164). Routledge.

²⁹ Møller, J. S., & Jørgensen, J. N. (2012). Enregisterment among adolescents in superdiverse Copenhagen. *Tilburg papers in culture studies*, 28, 1-15.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

This conceptualization of language denies the ontological reality of language, instead favoring a viewing of them as social constructs that serve a specific purpose.³⁰ That is, this perspective denies the existence of any independent entity known as “Spanish” or “Greek” but only what speakers *associate* with those terms. A speaker can access a diverse set of linguistic resources to use at their discretion in a variety of social contexts. A *native speaker* would lay claim to all of the “rights” associated with a set of linguistic resources and a *language learner* would be in the process of being accepted by those with those linguistic rights, along a continuum. The concept of diglossia is crucially important to understanding the linguistic situation in Greco-Roman Palestine, which can help to understand the language of composition of Gospel texts. There is some overlap in the claims made by Church Fathers regarding the composition of Matthew in either Hebrew or Aramaic with the claim that there was a Jewish Gospel composed in Hebrew or Aramaic, sometimes called the Gospel of the Hebrews. Additionally, the borders between languages will become important in this study, as well as the types of variation found therein. This paper’s analysis will continue to answer the question of which languages were used in first-century Greco-Roman Palestine, and how they were used.

LANGUAGES IN FIRST-CENTURY PALESTINE

Before being able to understand the nuances of language use in the first century CE, a brief historical chronology should be provided to orient the reader to the various periods of history referenced in this section. The scope of analysis in this paper refers to the Greco-Roman period in Palestine, which began in the fourth century BCE and lasted well into the second century CE with the Bar Kokhba revolt. This paper includes references to the Hasmonean period, which began with the Maccabean revolt in 167 BCE and led to the establishment of an independent state ruled by the Maccabean family until its incorporation into the Roman Empire as a vassal state in 63 BCE. The Roman period began in 63 BCE and was marked by two conflicts. First, the Jewish-Roman war from 66 to 73 CE resulted in the destruction of the Second Temple and the Bar Kokhba revolt from 132 to 136 CE. Both of these led to the depopulation of Jews in Jerusalem and the establishment of the Roman colony of Aelia Capitolina in Jerusalem.

The linguistic situation in Palestine has been summarized in the following way,

“That some measure of Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek was in use among the Jews of late Second Temple Judaea is thus agreed. Any attempt to move a single step beyond that banality, however, and consensus dissipates like fog in the morning sun.”³¹

As previously mentioned, Aramaic is assumed to have been the common vernacular. However, the discovery of Hebrew documents from the Bar Kokhba period from Murabba’at³² are given as evidence for the use of Mishnaic Hebrew at that time, referring to the variety of Hebrew used in the rabbinic document called the Mishnah. This text purported to contain the text of the oral Torah, believed by rabbinic Jews to have been given by God with the Five Books of Moses and contained the valid interpretation of the Torah’s commandments. Some scholars from the early twentieth century maintain that Aramaic was used by the upper classes, but that Mishnaic Hebrew was used by the lower classes.³³ Textual evidence exists to show the use of Aramaic in Greco-Roman Palestine, including literature found at Qumran. The Talmud records dialectal variation in Galilean Aramaic, which are ascribed negative social values, i.e. improper pronunciation

³⁰ Androutsopoulos, J. (2014). Linguaging when contexts collapse: Audience design in social networking. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 4, 62-73.

³¹ Wise, M. O. (2015). *Language and Literacy in Roman Judaea: A Study of the Bar Kokhba Documents*. Yale University Press, p. 20.

³² Referring to a series of caves near the Qumran settlements where soldiers in the Bar Kokhba revolt hid from the Romans.

³³ Segal, M. H. (1908). Mishnaic Hebrew and its relation to Biblical Hebrew and to Aramaic.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

which was perceived as “uneducated.”³⁴ The Judeans are praised for maintaining the teachings of Torah by carefully maintaining the distinction between the Hebrew letters *ayin* and *alef*, the former a guttural consonant, common in Arabic, and the latter a glottal stop, whereas the Galileans were not careful in their speech, and assumed to be less so in their religiosity.³⁵

Returning to the idea of extended diglossia, it seems likely that there were two languages in a diglossic situation: Aramaic and Greek, with the former being the low language and the latter the high language, with the possibility of pre-war usage of Hebrew in some capacity, resulting in a trilingual diglossic linguistic situation. Greek was a written language before 70 CE and Aramaic was an oral language. There seems to have been a change of status in the domain usage after the war, with Jews beginning to write in Hebrew and Aramaic and Christians electing Greek.³⁶ The type of Hebrew used by rabbinic Jews in the composition of the Mishnah around 200 CE has been characterized as “artificial” in the sense that it points to the assumption that speakers of Aramaic and Greek *intentionally* revived Hebrew from its status as a dead classical language.³⁷

Greek was the lingua franca of the Greco-Roman world of the time. Some point to the multicultural nature of Galilee of the time as evidence of the possible prevalence of Greek at the time, noting its status as a bilingual province. The importance of knowing Greek, primarily for commercial purposes cannot be overstated.³⁸ However, there are few archeological remains from Galilee to confirm these scholarly assumptions.³⁹ Lower Galilee was called the “Galilee of the Gentiles” and more heavily influenced by Greek (Matthew 4:15). It was surrounded by Greek culture in the Decapolis, Caesarea Tyre and Sidon, etc. Greek was used by the elite⁴⁰ and considered the *prestige language* of that society, dominating the educational, political and economic domains.⁴¹ Many coins in Greek have been found from the 1st century CE, beginning with the Hasmoneans, until exclusive Greek coinage under the Herodians. A number of papyri have been found in Greek that were written by Jews. Sacred literature such as the Greek versions of Daniel and Esther were composed around this time, including the Septuagint⁴², as well as non-sacred writers, such as Josephus, among many others. Jerusalem was the locus of Hellenized native cities and the process of Hellenization continued throughout the Hasmonean period until Greek had become the administrative language by the first century CE.⁴³ Archaeological and textual evidence confirms the importance of Greek, with recent statistics pointing to the proliferation of Greek in inscription data, with around 70% of inscriptions being composed in that language, even in Jerusalem, where Greek inscriptions are equal in number to Semitic inscriptions.⁴⁴ For a period of approximately 300 years, from around 200

³⁴ Similar to the way that some dialects of English are perceived today. One can think of the stereotypes of Southern US English varieties for a contemporary comparison.

³⁵ From the Talmudic witness, it seems that other guttural consonants were weakened in Galilee. See, Safrai, S. (2006). Spoken and Literary Languages in the Time of Jesus. In *Jesus' Last Week* (pp. 225-244). Brill., c.f. b. Eruv. 53a-b; y Ber. 4d, etc.

³⁶ Hezser, C. (2020). Jewish literacy and languages in first-century roman Palestine. *Orientalia*, 89(1), 58-77.

³⁷ Schwartz, S. (1995). Language, power and identity in ancient Palestine. *Past & Present*, (148), 3-47, p. 14.

³⁸ Argyle, A. W. (1973). Greek among the Jews of Palestine in New Testament Times 1. *New Testament Studies*, 20(1), p. 88.

³⁹ Chancey, M. A. (2005). *Greco-Roman culture and the Galilee of Jesus* (Vol. 134). Cambridge University Press, pp. 122-165.

⁴⁰ Lester Grabbe. *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, p. 1:158.

⁴¹ Porter, S. E. (1993). Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?. *Tyndale Bulletin*, 44, 199-235.

⁴² The ancient translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek.

⁴³ Hengel, M. (2003). *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their encounter in Palestine during the early Hellenistic period*. Wipf and Stock Publishers; Schwartz, S. (1995). Language, power and identity in ancient Palestine. *Past & Present*, (148), 3-47; Smelik, W. (2010). The Languages of Roman Palestine, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. C. Hezser. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 122-41.

⁴⁴ Rahmani, L. Y., Rahmani, L. Y., & Sussmann, A. (1994). *A catalogue of Jewish ossuaries: in the collections of the State of Israel*. Israel Antiquities Authority.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

BCE. Onwards, only twelve pieces [in Galilee] are listed. Of these twelve, nine are in Greek, one in Aramaic, and two in a "Semitic" language. From the six pieces attributed to the first century CE (including the thirty years after 70 CE), only one ostrakon⁴⁵ from Jotapata has an unidentified "Semitic" inscription, the rest are in Greek.⁴⁶ There is also a noticeable lack of Hebrew in non-literary writing from pre-70 CE Judea, when consulting ossuaries⁴⁷ and inscription evidence from the archaeological record. However, Wise's recent study on funerary inscriptions in Jerusalem shows a slightly stronger preference for Semitic inscriptions, showing 32.5% in Greek, 27.8% in "indistinct Semitic", 21.8% clearly in Aramaic and 7.7% in Hebrew, with the rest being some bilingual combination or other possibilities.

The implications of these data point to the status of Greek as widely spoken, even by Palestinian Jews.⁴⁸ However, Hebrew and Aramaic had well-defined roles in society of the time. Aramaic was the language of daily writing, primarily for legal documents and signing one's name. Ordinary people likely did not read Aramaic either: it was scholars and the elite who read Aramaic like they read Hebrew. Wise's study of the Bar Kokhba letters notes that witnesses signed in Hebrew in 25% of the cases, which he notes as a high number, countering scholars who disagree with the possibility of a vernacular Hebrew. The Jerusalem scribes were the most proficient in Hebrew with twenty-seven 27 of 33 able to sign in Hebrew. Wise bases his conclusion that Hebrew was still a vernacular language in Roman Judaea on these data. Those who were not able to speak the language might have been from the Galilee and the Diaspora, where Hebrew knowledge was lower. Wise concludes that 65-80% of Judaeans spoke a form of Hebrew, with a proposed dialect continuum with a variety of Mishnaic Hebrew used for speech, and a form of biblical Hebrew used in writing, and only elites would use the standard biblical variety. This suggests that Hebrew was the language of literature in multilingual Judaea, looking at the Dead Sea Scrolls literature in that language. The ruling class would have acquired Hebrew literacy, and these elites would be spread throughout the country with each village housing someone able to read the Torah. Wise's study shows a lack of literate Judaeans ability to sign in Greek, with about 25% of the time this occurred. They did not learn Greek only for signing purposes. Wise proposes "alternative literacies" with two parallel tracks, one Semitic and one Hellenic with the ability to read the scriptures in Hebrew and the ability to read the classics in Greek in literary literacy. There were Judaeans literary works in Greek and the scriptures were available in Greek translation in circulation in Judaea in the first century CE. Knowledge of Greek was useful (and perhaps necessary) for village elites. Wise concludes that around 16% of Judaeans adults were signature literate, with that including around 65% of the male elite.

To conclude, while the study of language use in Greco-Roman Palestine is fraught with difficulties and the lack of an abundance of evidence, the available data seem to point to the use of Aramaic as a common vernacular, with elites having particular access to Greek and Hebrew. Greek, in particular, might have served some economic utility for members of non-elite classes that Hebrew did not. It is unclear how prevalent Hebrew would have been used by non-elites. Having this background into the complex linguistic situation of first-century CE Palestine, we now turn towards the issue at hand, first unpacking the meaning of *dialektos* in ancient Greek literature.

⁴⁵ Referring to broken pieces of pottery from earthenware vessels that have writing on them.

⁴⁶ Adan-Bayewitz, D., & Aviam, M. (1997). Iotapata, Josephus, and the siege of 67: preliminary report on the 1992-94 seasons. *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 10, 131-165.

⁴⁷ Referring to small containers for human remains in burial. In Judea, they were used in the first century CE as a secondary burial after being entombed in a cave or similar place. Analysis of the names found on ossuaries is an important aspect of studying both language use and the frequency of certain names used in that period.

⁴⁸ Avigad, N. (1976). *Beth She'arim: Report on the Excavations During 1953-1958. Catacombs 12-23* (Vol. 3). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

THE GREEK WORD *Dialektos* [Διάλεκτος]

Van Rooy⁴⁹ provides an excellent analysis into the use of the word, διάλεκτος (*dialektos*), in the ancient world, together with other authors discuss the issue of how διάλεκτος was understood in the Greco-Roman world.⁵⁰ His work shows how this word was used by ancient authors in a way that approximates the way that sociolinguists use the term *variation*, with several different axes. Ancient authors were aware of linguistic variation, as Herodotus makes clear, “But they [i.e. the Ionians of Asia Minor] do not use the same speech, but four modes of variations.”⁵¹ This is not an instance where the word διάλεκτος is used but the author labels the four varieties of ancient Greek in Asia Minor as “τρόποι παραγωγέων” (*tropoi paragogeon*, ‘modes of variation’).⁵²

The word διάλεκτος seems to carry a general meaning which is something like *manner of speech* or *way of speaking*. This is attested by several authors (Aristophanes, ca. 450-385 BCE, Plato 428-347 BCE, etc.).⁵³ The term can certainly have *diastratic* connotations, meaning the variation in language found between different social groups (age, sex, profession, etc.).⁵⁴ This use of διάλεκτος is mentioned by Sextus Empiricus (190-210 CE), “His language is the normal *dialektos* of the city: not the fancy high-society accent, nor uneducated, rustic talk.”⁵⁵ In addition to this clear reference to diastratic variation, in the sense that the author contrasts the *dialektos* of the city, especially between the accents of “high society” individuals versus uneducated individuals, Sextus Empiricus also references *diatopic* variation across geographical locations.

Diogenes of Babylon makes a clearer reference to *diatopic* variation, “*Dialektos* is *lexis* [‘discernable voice’] ‘stamped’ ‘tribally’ and ‘Greekly’, or *lexis* of a certain country, that is, having a certain quality according to a *dialektos*, as *thalatta*”⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Van Rooy, R. (2016). “What is a ‘dialect?’” Some new perspectives on the history of the term διάλεκτος and its interpretations in ancient Greece and Byzantium. *Glotta*, 92(1), 244-279.

⁵⁰ Cassio, A. C. (1984). Il “carattere” dei dialetti greci e l’opposizione Ioni-Dori: Testimonianze antiche e teorie di età romantica (su Arist. Quint. 2. 13, Iambl. v. Pyth. 241 sgg., sch. in Dion. Thr. p. 117, 18 sgg. Hilgard). *AIΩN: Annali del Dipartimento di Studi del Mondo Classico e del Mediterraneo Antico. Sezione linguistica*, 6, 113-136; Cassio, A. C. (1993). *Parlate locali, dialetti delle stirpi e fonti letterarie nei grammatici greci*. Ediciones de la Universidad Autonoma; Fenoglio, S. (2009). La riflessione sui dialetti nei Commentari all’*Odissea* di Eustazio di Tessalonica. *Quaderni del dipartimento di filologia, linguistica e tradizione classica*, 239-254; Fenoglio, S. (2012). *Eustazio di Tessalonica, Commentari all’Odissea: glossario dei termini grammaticali*. Edizioni dell’Orso; Lambert, F. (2009). Les noms des langues chez les Grecs. *Histoire Épistémologie Langage*, 31(2), 15-27; Morpurgo Davies, A. (1987). The Greek notion of dialect. *Verbum*, 10(1), 2; Morpurgo Davies, A. (1993). Geography, history and dialect: the case of Oropos. *Dialectologica Graeca. Actas del II Coloquio Internacional de Dialectología Griega (Miraflores de la Sierra [Madrid], 19-21 de junio de 1991)*, 261-279; Munz, R. (1921). Über γλωττα und διάλετος und über ein posidonianisches Fragment bei Strabo. Ein sprachwissenschaftlich-philologischer Exkurs zu Posidonius bei Strabo C 176 über dialektische Verschiedenheiten bei den Galliern. *Glotta*, 11(1./2. H), 85-94;

⁵¹ Γλώσσαν δὲ οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν οὗτοι νενομίκασι, ἀλλὰ τρόπους τέσσαρας παραγωγέων; Greek citations are taken from the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG) online database, unless mentioned otherwise.

⁵² Hainsworth, J. B. (1967). Greek views of Greek dialectology. *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 66(1), p. 66.

⁵³ Mackridge, P. (2009). Mothers and daughters, roots and branches: Modern Greek perceptions of the relationship between the ancient and modern languages. *Standard languages and language standards: Greek, past and present*, 259-276.

⁵⁴ Coseriu, E. (1981). Los conceptos de dialecto, nivel y estilo de lengua y el sentido propio de la dialectología. *LEA: Lingüística española actual*, 3(1), 1-32.

⁵⁵ διάλεκτον ἔχοντα μέσσην πόλεως, οὐτ’ ἀστείαν ὑποθηλυτέραν οὐτ’ ἀνελεύθερον ὑπαγροικότεραν; Colvin, St. (1999): *Dialect in Aristophanes and the Politics of Language in Ancient Greek Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 283.

⁵⁶ Pronounced *thalassa* in Koiné and later varieties of Greek



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

(sea) in the Attic and hēmerē in the Ionic.”⁵⁷ This reference associates διάλεκτος with the *lexis* [λέξις, speech] of Greece, or any country for that matter, thus making the comparison that διάλεκτος as language that has distinct categories based on geographical location. Διάλεκτος can also have *diaphasic* meaning, referring to variation in style and register, which is marked in Greek as a deviation from formal language, identified with *koinē*.⁵⁸

Διάλεκτος can also be used to refer to the ethnic Other when contrasted with the speech varieties of non-Greek peoples, functioning as a type of ethnic identity marker. The second to third-century CE theologian, Clement of Alexandria, adds a further clarification that the speech of other peoples is considered different from διάλεκτος and in fact is called γλώσσα (*glossa*), a “tongue,” as he states, “The Greeks contend that the *dialektoi* with them are five in number, Attic, Ionic, Doric, Aeolic, and as a fifth the koinē, but that the sounds of barbarians, which are incomprehensible, are not even to be called *dialektoi*, but *glossa*” (Stromata 1, 21, 142, 4).⁵⁹ One can think of the ways that non-native English varieties are often stigmatized by native speakers of English as Other to understand the ways that native Greek speakers thought of the *dialektoi* of other peoples.

All of this suggests a rather broad definition for διάλεκτος, which could only be inadequately translated into English as a *linguistic variety*, relying on modern terminology, although it includes all of Coseriu’s dimensions. These reflections are also observed in Christian literature, where *dialektos* refers to a distinct *language* as commonly understood in the Septuagint, New Testament and early Church Fathers.⁶⁰ However, it can also be used to mean a dialect.⁶¹ That Nevertheless, one previously unmentioned usage of *dialektos* can also be found in Eusebius, where he uses the term to refer to an idiolect, a personal way of speech, including the errors one makes in a second language:

“Moreover, it can also be shown that the diction of the Gospel and Epistle differs from that of the Apocalypse. For they were written not only without error as regards the Greek language, but also with elegance in their expression, in their reasonings, and in their entire structure. They are far indeed from betraying any barbarism or solecism, or any vulgarism. For the writer had, as it seems, both the requisites of discourse — that is, the gift of knowledge and the gift of expression — as the Lord had bestowed them both upon him. I do not deny that the other writer saw a revelation and received knowledge and prophecy. I perceive, however, that his dialect and language are not accurate Greek, but that he uses barbarous idioms, and, in some places, solecisms.”⁶²

The inherent ambiguity in the Greek word *dialektos* complicates any attempt to understand what could be referred to in the reference to a *Hebraidi dialektos* as the language of composition of the Gospel. It could refer to a dialect,

⁵⁷ διάλεκτος δέ ἐστι λέξις κεχαραγμένη ἔθνικῶς τε καὶ Ἑλληνικῶς, ἢ λέξις ποταπή, τουτέστι ποιὰ κατὰ διάλεκτον, οἷον κατὰ μὲν τὴν Ἀτθίδα θάλαττα, κατὰ δὲ τὴν Ἰάδα Ἡμέρη; Vitae philosophorum, 7, 56.

⁵⁸ Versteegh, C. H. M. (1986): “Latinitas, Hellenismos, ‘Arabiyya’”. *Historiographia Linguistica* 13 (2–3): p. 431-432; Tribulato, O. (2014): “Dialectology (diálektos), Ancient Theories of”. In *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics*, edited by G. K. Giannakis, 1:457–461. Leiden: Brill.

⁵⁹ Φασι δὲ οἱ Ἕλληνες διαλέκτους εἶναι τὰς παρὰ σφίσι εἰ, Ἀτθίδα, Ἰάδα, Δωρίδα, Αἰολίδα καὶ πέμπτην τὴν κοινήν, ἀπεριλήπτους δὲ οὐσας τὰς βαρβάρων φωνὰς μηδὲ διαλέκτους, ἀλλὰ γλώσσας λέγεσθαι... However, Clement does use *dialektos* to refer to the “Hebrew way of speaking”: Ἐχει δ’ οὖν καὶ ἄλλας τινὰς ιδιότητας ἢ Ἑβραίων διάλεκτος, καθάπερ καὶ ἐκάστη τῶν λοιπῶν, λόγον τινὰ ἐμπεριέχουσα ἔθνικὸν ἐμφαίνοντα χαρακτῆρα. διάλεκτον γοῦν ὀρίζονται λέξιν ἔθνικῶ χαρακτῆρι συντελουμένην. (Stromata, 6, 15, 129, 2) Thus, the διάλεκτος of Hebrews also has a number of other properties, like each of the remaining [διάλεκτοι], entailing some λόγος [‘meaningful speech’] that shows the ethnic character. In any case, one defines διάλεκτος as λέξις [‘speech, discernable voice’] that is realized through the ethnic character.

⁶⁰ Esther 9:26; Daniel 1:4; Acts 1:19; 2:2, 6, 8; 22:2; 26:14 4Eusebius 22:7; 5Eusebius 8:2,11-12

⁶¹ Epistle to Diognetus 5:2

⁶² 7Eusebius 25:24-26; a *solecism* is an ungrammatical utterance in writing or speech.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

language, or linguistic style. We must turn to the word *Hebraisti* to be able to determine if it could shed any light on the possible meaning of *dialektos* in this context.

Ἑβραῖς, Ἑβραϊστί, Ἑβραϊκή AND RABBINIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF SEMITIC LANGUAGE VARIETIES

Other terms to consider are the related words *hebrais*, *hebraisti*, *hebraike* [Ἑβραῖς, Ἑβραϊστί, Ἑβραϊκή], which is commonly thought to refer to the Aramaic language.⁶³ Buth and Pierce⁶⁴ question this assumption through an extensive analysis of texts from the Greco-Roman period. Their analysis of 2 Kings 18:26-28 in the Septuagint clearly demonstrates that the previous terms should be thought of as referring to *Hebrew* rather than *Aramaic*, as commonly assumed. This is due to the contrast between Συριστί (*Suristi*, Aramaic language) and Ιουδαῖστί (*Joudaisti*, Judean language) in the text.⁶⁵ Pseudepigraphical literature⁶⁶ consistently uses the term, Ἑβραῖστί (*hebraisti*), to refer to Hebrew, rather than Aramaic. 4 Maccabees states, "But after his mother had exhorted him in the Hebrew language, as we shall tell a little later (4 Maccabees 12:7)."⁶⁷ Here the meaning is clearly in reference to the *Hebrew language*, as distinct from other languages. In earlier literature, we have, "For what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same effect when translated into another language"⁶⁸ from the translated text from Hebrew into Greek.

The testimony of Josephus is crucial, as he clearly distinguishes between the two varieties in his writings, most clearly in the following example:

"Accordingly Moses says, That in just six days the world, and all that is therein, was made. And that the seventh day was a rest, and a release from the labor of such operations; whence it is that we celebrate a rest from our labors on that day, and call it the Sabbath, which word denotes rest in the Hebrew tongue" (Josephus, Antiquities 1:33).⁶⁹

This shows his translation of a Hebrew word clearly into Greek.⁷⁰ In other cases, though, his usage is inconsistent. In another case, he refers to individuals speaking "Hebrew" in Susa, a city in Persia, which seems unlikely.

⁶³ Frederick William Danker, editor and reviser, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature, Third Edition (BDAG), based on Walter Bauer's Griechischdeutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur, 6th edition (ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann) and on previous English editions by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁶⁴ Buth, R., & Pierce, C. (2014). 3 Hebraisti in Ancient Texts: Does Ἑβραῖστί Ever Mean "Aramaic"? In *The language environment of first-century Judaea* (pp. 66-109). Brill.

⁶⁵ Other references to Aramaic (Συριστί) in the Septuagint can be found in Ezra 4:7; Daniel 2:4; Job 42:17.

⁶⁶ An unfortunately broad term that strictly refers to works that are falsely claimed to be written by an author, perhaps best exemplified in the so-called "Pastoral Epistles which are claimed to be written by Paul, not accepted by most scholars. However, this category can include other works that do not strictly fit this definition.

⁶⁷ ὁ δὲ τῆς μητρὸς τῆ **Ἑβραῖδι** φωνῆ προτρεψαμένης αὐτόν ὡς ἐροῦμεν μετὰ μικρὸν ὕστερον.

⁶⁸ οὐ γὰρ ἰσοδυναμεῖ αὐτὰ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς **Ἑβραῖστί** λεγόμενα καὶ ὅταν μεταχθῆ εἰς ἑτέραν γλῶσσαν (Sirach, Introduction 1:21-22).

⁶⁹ καὶ τὸν κόσμον ἐξ ταῖς πάσαις ἡμέραις Μωυσῆς καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ φησὶ γενέσθαι, τῆ δὲ ἐβδόμη ἀναπαύσασθαι καὶ λαβεῖν ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων ἐκεχειρίαν, ὅθεν καὶ ἡμεῖς σχολὴν ἀπὸ τῶν πόνων κατὰ ταύτην ἄγομεν τὴν ἡμέραν προσαγορεύοντες αὐτὴν σάββατα: δηλοῖ δὲ ἀνάπαυσιν κατὰ τὴν Ἑβραίων διάλεκτον τοῦνομα C.f. "καὶ ὁ Ἰώσηπος, ὡς ἂν εἴη μὴ τῷ Ἰωάννῃ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἐν ἐπηκόῳ, τὰ τε τοῦ Καίσαρος διήγγελλεν **Ἑβραῖζων**, [6.97] καὶ πολλὰ προσηντιβόλει φείσασθαι τῆς πατρίδος καὶ διασκεδάσαι τοῦ ναοῦ γευόμενον ἤδη τὸ πῦρ, τούς τ' ἐναγισμοὺς ἀποδοῦναι τῷ θεῷ / Upon this Josephus stood in such a place where he might be heard, not by John only, but by many more; and then declared to them what Cæsar had given him in charge: and this in the Hebrew language" (Josephus, War 6:96-97).

⁷⁰ In other places, he refers to Aramaic by "characters of the Syrians, "δοκεῖ μὲν γὰρ εἶναι τῆ ιδιότητι τῶν Συρίων γραμμάτων ἐμπερὴς ὁ χαρακτήρ αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν φωνὴν ὁμοίαν αὐτοῖς ἀπχεῖν, ἰδιότροπον δὲ αὐτὴν εἶναι συμβέβηκεν. οὐδὲν οὖν ἔλεγεν



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

“Now there was one of those Jews that had been carried captive who was cupbearer to king Xerxes; his name was Nehemiah. As this man was walking before Susa, the metropolis of the Persians, he heard some strangers that were entering the city, after a long journey, speaking to one another in the Hebrew tongue” (Josephus, Antiquities 11.159).⁷¹

In addition to the slight confusion among Greek speakers, it seems also that there was ambiguity among speakers of Semitic languages. Rabbinic literature⁷² does not refer to *Hebrew* and *Aramaic* with explicit references to the name of each language, but uses other means. The language “Aramaic” is mentioned explicitly only in a few passages throughout the rabbinic corpus. One such reference occurs in m. Shekalim 5:3, where the inscriptions on Temple seals are being discussed. The side comment of Ben Azzai⁷³ explicitly references Aramaic.

There were four seals in the Temple, and on them was inscribed [respectively]: ‘calf’, ‘ram’, ‘kid’, ‘sinner’. Ben Azzai says: there were five and on them was inscribed in Aramaic

אָרְבַּע הָיוּ הַתְּמוֹת הַיּוֹ בְּמִקְדָּשׁ, וְכָתוּב עֲלֵיהֶן, עֵגֶל, זָכָר, גְּדִי, חוּטָא.
כָּתוּב עֲלֵיהֶן בֶּן עֲזַאִי אוֹמֵר, תְּמִשָּׁה הִיּוּ, וְאֲרַמִּית

However, in other cases, the name of the language is not said explicitly. Typically, a variation of the root תַּרְגוּם (*targum*, ‘translation’)⁷⁴ is used to convey the use of the Aramaic language. On some occasions, this is only implied. In b. Berakhot 40b, the Rabbis discuss the permissibility of using the Aramaic language to recite a religious blessing. The text of the Aramaic prayer is included without any reference to the language of the blessing.⁷⁵ Later in the text, the language of the blessing, in לְשׁוֹן הוֹל (*lashon hol*, “secular language”) is contrasted to *lashon kodesh* (“holy language”, i.e. Hebrew). The Talmud later mentions the Aramaic language in more explicit ways⁷⁶, while also still relying on the alternative *targum*.⁷⁷ In one case, the Gemara translates Hebrew words into Aramaic, stating simple “גוּמְלָא — כוּסְמִין” (*gumla, kusmin*) without explicitly saying either *this is Hebrew or Aramaic*, a similar case is found in b. Berakhot 32a and b. Pesachim 39a.

While the evidence is not conclusive, one could read the textual evidence in rabbinic literature to indicate that Hebrew and Aramaic were considered separate ends of a spectrum, rather than different discrete “languages.” This is coupled with an early Christian disregard for the status of Aramaic and Hebrew as separate languages. This would also combine

κωλύειν καὶ ταῦτα μεταβαλόντα, δύνασθαι γὰρ τῆς εἰς αὐτὸ χορηγίας εὐποροῦντα, ἔχειν ἐν τῇ βιβλιοθήκῃ καὶ τὰ παρ’ ἐκείνοις / But be said he had been informed that there were many books of laws among the Jews worthy of inquiring after, and worthy of the king’s library, but which, being written in characters and in a dialect of their own, will cause no small pains in getting them translated into the Greek tongue; that the character in which they are written seems to be like to that which is the proper character of the Syrians, and that its sound, when pronounced, is like theirs also; and that this sound appears to be peculiar to themselves” (Josephus Antiquities 12:15).

⁷¹ Τῶν δ’ αἰχμαλωτισθέντων τις Ἰουδαίων οἰνοχόος τοῦ βασιλέως Ξέρξου Νεεμίας ὄνομα περιπατῶν πρὸ τῆς μητροπόλεως τῶν Περσῶν Σούσων, ξένων τινῶν ἀπὸ μακρᾶς ὁδοπορίας εἰς τὴν πόλιν εἰσιόντων ἐπακούσας ἐβραϊστὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὁμιλούντων προσελθὼν αὐτοῖς ἐπυνθάνετο, πόθεν εἶεν παραγενόμενοι; Philo does not distinguish between Hebrew and Aramaic, referring to the language that the Torah was composed in as “Chaldean” (Moses 2:26).

⁷² Roughly dated from around 200 CE to 600 CE.

⁷³ Second-century CE rabbinic figure.

⁷⁴ m. Megillah 2:1; 4:6; m. Yadayim 4:5

⁷⁵ The matter of the debate centers on the nature of the structure of blessings (*berakhot*) which must include the name of God in rabbinic legislation.

⁷⁶ y. Megillah 1:9; b. Sanhedrin 21b; b. Shabbat 12b

⁷⁷ b. Berakhot 28a; b. Megillah 3a; 21b; b. Yoma 69b



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

well with Wise's proposition that *Hebrew* was spoken along a linguistic continuum in the first century CE, with speakers alternating between "high" and "low" varieties but with the addition of Aramaic as the farthest end of the continuum against biblical Hebrew.⁷⁸ Perhaps as evidence for this, the Jerusalem Talmud (c. 350-400 CE) shows a clear diglossic separation of different languages into domains:

y. Sotah 7:2

אמר רבי יונתן דבית גוברין. ארבעה לשונות נאין להשתמש בהן העולם. ואילוי הן. לעז לזמור. רומי לקרב. סורסי לאלייא. עברי לדיבור. ויש אומרים. אף אשורי לקרב.

Rabbi Jonathan from Bet Gubrin said, four languages are good for use: The foreign language for song, Latin for war, Syriac for elegies, Hebrew for speech. Some people say, also Assyrian for writing.

To summarize, the evidence from Greek usage supports the assertion of *Hebraisti* as referring to the *Hebrew* language, i.e. the language of the Bible (and later rabbinic literature). The Rabbis distinguished clearly between Hebrew and Aramaic through the diglossic terminology of referring to Aramaic as *targum* ('translation'). However, Josephus' and Philo's inconsistency gives enough room to suspect that not all Greco-Roman authors clearly distinguished between Hebrew and Aramaic.

THE HEBREW GOSPEL AND *DIALEKTOS*

Early Christian authors make several claims around the provenance of the Gospel of Matthew, which is claimed to have originally been composed in Hebrew and then translated into Greek. Eusebius (d. c. 339 CE) preserves the comments of Papias (d. c. 130 CE) concerning the claim that Matthew was first written in Hebrew, when he states,

"But concerning Matthew he writes as follows: So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew manner of speech, and every one interpreted them as he was able. And the same writer uses testimonies from the first Epistle of John and from that of Peter likewise. And he relates another story of a woman, who was accused of many sins before the Lord, which is contained in the Gospel according to the Hebrews. These things we have thought it necessary to observe in addition to what has been already stated (3Eusebius 39:16; c.f. 5Eusebius 8:2)."⁷⁹

Papias' comments note that he had a tradition that stated that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew and translated into Greek. The matter is complicated by the reference to the Gospel of the Hebrews in the second half of the fragment. It seems that he is referencing a different book at this point but the use of both names in the same discourse further complicates the nature of his claims.

Iranaeus also commented on the origin of Matthew in Hebrew, "Matthew also issued a written gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect" (Against Heresies 3:1). However, his comments complicate things further with the allusion to the Gospel of the Hebrews, the separate non-canonical text used by Jewish Christian groups. Eusebius also quotes Origen to the same effect,

⁷⁸ In rabbinic parlance, this would create a continuum from *targum* (Aramaic, 'translation') to *miqra* (Hebrew, 'scripture').

⁷⁹ ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἰστορήται τῷ Παπία περὶ τοῦ Μάρκου: περὶ δὲ τοῦ Ματθαίου ταῦτ' εἶρηται: 'Ματθαῖος μὲν οὖν Ἐβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ τὰ λόγια συνετάξατο, ἡρμηνεύσεν δ' αὐτὰ ὡς ἦν δυνατὸς ἑκάστος.' Κέχρηται δ' ὁ αὐτὸς μαρτυρίας ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰωάννου προτέρας ἐπιστολῆς καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς Πέτρου ὁμοίως, ἐκτέθειται δὲ καὶ ἄλλην ἱστορίαν περὶ γυναικὸς ἐπὶ πολλαῖς ἀμαρτίαις διαβληθείσης ἐπὶ τοῦ κυρίου, ἣν τὸ καθ' Ἐβραίους εὐαγγέλιον περιέχει. καὶ ταῦτα δ' ἡμῖν ἀναγκάτως πρὸς τοῖς ἐκτεθεῖσιν ἐπιτετηρήσθω



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

“Among the four Gospels, which are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that the first was written by Matthew, who was once a publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, and it was prepared for the converts from Judaism, and published in the Hebrew language” (Church History 6.25.4).⁸⁰

Eusebius’ comments are, by far, the clearest of the Church Fathers’ statements regarding the linguistic origins of Matthew. Despite the complications, it seems reasonable to assume that these authors are referring to the canonical Gospel of Matthew. This points to an early understanding, if Eusebius preserves Papias’ words faithfully, that the Gospel of Matthew was either *originally* composed in “Hebrew *dialektos*” or that a Greek and Hebrew version were prepared for circulation at the same time.

Papias refers to the language variety of the original Hebrew Gospel as Ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτω whereas Origen uses Ἑβραϊκοίς. In the descriptions of this Gospel, there is a potential conflict between the analysis of Van Rooy and Buth and Pierce. Applying Van Rooy’s analysis of *dialektos*, Ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτω should be understood as *in the Hebrew manner of speech* or even *variety*. This should be understood as an ethnic identity marker usage of *dialektos* for non-Greek speech, which conforms with modern understanding of how linguistic varieties are used by speakers to construct their own social identities.⁸¹ This means that the use of *dialektos* would point us to the conclusion that Papias is referring to a particularly Jewish way of speaking Greek, or even by emphasizing Jewish themes.⁸² This might imply a certain number of Semitisms and a lexical style characterized by the use of Semitic loanwords, characteristic of the Septuagint.⁸³ This is a characteristic of modern Jewish linguistic varieties, which consist of specialized repertoires “that Jews deploy selectively as they present themselves as Jews and as various types of Jews.”⁸⁴ However, using Van Rooy’s analysis, one issue is not resolved, which is to ascertain whether or not Ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτω refers to a distinct Semitic language in contrast to Indo-European Greek, or some other meaning. In this sense, the use of *Hebraidis* points to the composition of the text in the Hebrew language, i.e. the language of the Bible.

Another issue to consider is the process that Papias described. First, Matthew composed the sayings of Jesus in the Hebrew *dialektos* and the others “translated” or “interpreted” them “as he was able.” Gundry reads the term ἡρμήνευσεν (*ermeneusen*) as referring to “interpret”, rather than “translate.” This is how the word is used in broader Greek literature, to refer to the interpretation of dreams and oracles, with a separate word for *translation*. This reading should be considered, especially given a lack of evidence to point towards a translation of Gospel texts from a Semitic variety into

⁸⁰ ἐν παραδόσει μαθῶν περὶ τῶν τεσσάρων εὐαγγελίων, ἃ καὶ μόνῃ ἀναντίρρητῇ ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὅτι πρῶτον μὲν γέγραπται τὸ κατὰ τὸν ποτε τελώνην, ὕστερον δὲ ἀπόστολον Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ Ματθαῖον, ἐκδεδωκότα αὐτὸ τοῖς ἀπὸ Ἰουδαϊσμοῦ πιστεύουσιν, γράμμασιν Ἑβραϊκοῖς συντεταγμένον

⁸¹ Sebba, M., Mahootian, S., & Jonsson, C. (Eds.). (2012).

⁸² Gundry, R. H. (2005). The apostolically Johannine pre-Papian tradition concerning the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. *The Old is Better*, 67-68; Kürzinger, J. (1963). Irenäus und sein Zeugnis zur Sprache des Matthäusevangeliums 6. *New Testament Studies*, 1(1), 108-115.

⁸³ The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible used by Jews in the Diaspora.

⁸⁴ Benor, S. B. (2008). Towards a New Understanding of Jewish Language in the Twenty-First Century. *Religion Compass*, 2(6), 1062-1080.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Greek.⁸⁵ This could be the reason for Eusebius' mention of the Gospel of the Hebrews, presumably the lost Gospel text of the Ebionite sect⁸⁶, although some contest this interpretation.⁸⁷

That would explain one part of the phrase, however. However, Ἑβραϊδι διαλέκτω⁸⁸ also uses the terms that Buth and Pierce argued refer *exclusively* to Hebrew. However, there is reason to introduce some doubt into Buth and Pierce's certainty, which is to note that the Gospel of John does not use the term as consistently as other sources.⁸⁹ Yet, the authors conclude that because other authors of the period used the terms consistently, that the Gospel of John must be considered to have done so as well, even when the evidence is inconclusive. Within Buth and Pierce's analysis, it seems that the linguistic proficiency of the authors mentioned in ancient sources is of some importance. It does seem that known *bilingual* speakers clearly distinguished between Hebrew and Aramaic when using the terms, Ἑβραῖς, Ἑβραϊστί, Ἑβραϊκή, (i.e. Josephus) but monolingual speakers did not consistently distinguish (if Philo is considered not proficient in Hebrew). It is unclear whether or not Papias was proficient in Hebrew or Aramaic, but it seems unlikely that he was and, even if he was proficient in either language, he does not cite any material from the Hebrew version of Matthew.

In fact, the only Church Father to *cite* any texts from a Hebrew Gospel is Jerome (d. 420 CE). His comments surrounding the linguistic origins of the Gospel could perhaps enlighten some important details about this document. He went to Palestine to complete his translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew for the Vulgate Latin Bible. He states, "Matthew, who is also Levi, and who from a publican came to be an apostle, first of all composed a Gospel of Christ in Judaea in the **Hebrew language and characters** for the benefit of those of the circumcision who had believed. Who translated it after that in Greek is not sufficiently ascertained. Moreover, the Hebrew itself is preserved to this day in the library at Caesarea, which the martyr Pamphilus so diligently collected. I also was allowed by the Nazarenes who use this volume in the Syrian city of Beroea to copy it (On Illustrious Men, chapter III)." That is, Jerome claims that the Gospel of Matthew was written in the Hebrew language and in Hebrew script and that the Nazoraeans still used that document in his own day.

In another case, Jerome clarifies what Papias and Eusebius might have meant by "Hebrew." He states, "In the Gospel according to the Hebrews, which is written in the Chaldee and Syrian language, but in **Hebrew characters**, and is used by the Nazarenes to this day (I mean the Gospel according to the Apostles, or, as is generally maintained, the Gospel according to Matthew, a copy of which is in the library at Caesarea)" (Jerome, Against Pelagius III, 2). A brief note that this reference complicates the association of Matthew with the Hebrew language, as Jerome refers to this document as "the Gospel according to the Hebrews," although he clarifies that this is the same text as the "Gospel according to the Apostles" or as perhaps more commonly known as "the Gospel according to Matthew," which existed in Caesarea. Since Jerome is the only source for the Hebrew Gospel, we will take a moment to analyze one of his comments as an example of the type of material found in the document.

⁸⁵ Sim, D. C. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew, John the elder and the Papias tradition: A response to RH Gundry. *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies*, 63(1), 283-299.

⁸⁶ Referring to the group of believers in Jesus who continued to observe Jewish law, to some degree. This is sometimes referred to as "Jewish Christianity", even if that name might be somewhat problematic, in that the second-century group of Jesus-believers who called themselves *Christianoī* defined themselves and their understanding of Christ *against* Judaism, c.f. Jackson-McCabe, M. (2020). *Jewish Christianity: the making of the Christianity-Judaism divide*. Yale University Press.

⁸⁷ Kok, M. J. (2017). Did Papias of Hierapolis Use the Gospel according to the Hebrews as a Source?. *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 25(1), 29-53.

⁸⁸ This exact phrase is also used ambiguously by the author of Luke-Acts (Acts 21:40; 22:2; 26:14).

⁸⁹ The authors discuss the inconsistency of the Gospel of John in pp. 97ff.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Jerome comments on Matthew 6:11, "In the so-called Gospel according to the Hebrews, for "bread essential to existence" I found "mahar," which means "of tomorrow"; so the sense is: our bread for tomorrow, that is, of the future, give us this day (*Commentary on Matthew 6:11*)." This fragment gives an explicit citation of the word *mahar*, meaning 'tomorrow' in both Hebrew and Aramaic. This variant of this clause of the Lord's Prayer is unique from all other versions. It differs from the Greek manuscript tradition, but, perhaps more significantly, also from existing Semitic translations of the Greek New Testament. I refer to the Syriac translations of the Curetonian Old Syriac translation and the Peshitta translation into Syriac, both presented below.

(*hab lan lahma deshunqanan yawmana*)ܗܒ ܠܢ ܠܗܡܐ ܕܥܫܘܩܢܐܢ ܕܝܘܡܢܐPeshitta

(*welahman amina deyawma hab lan*)ܘܠܗܡܢܐܡܝܢܐ ܕܝܘܡܢܐܗܒ ܠܢCuretonian

Give us bread for our needs from day to day (Lamsa Edition of the Peshitta).

And our daily, constant bread, give us.⁹⁰

That is, the use of *mahar*, is a unique variant, found only in Jerome's quotation of the Hebrew version of Matthew that he reports to have seen in Caesarea.⁹¹ The type of comment here is an elucidatory remark meant to present the proper interpretation of Jesus' prayer. In comparing Jerome's text with the Syriac Gospel tradition, it might be possible to assume that Jerome was working with an early translation of Matthew *into* Hebrew. The types of variants found in what Jerome variously calls "Matthew", "the Gospel of the Hebrews" and "the Gospel of the Nazoraeans" provide elucidatory remarks, harmonization between Synoptic texts, and condensation of material. The Syriac Gospel tradition also presents several interesting variants from the Greek manuscript tradition, even more so in the Old Syriac manuscripts, which were "regularized" and brought into agreement with the Greek manuscripts in the Peshitta.⁹²

Returning to the issue of language and script, in this case, Papias and Eusebius *might* have referred to the script used in the text. This probably refers to the use of Aramaic block script to write the Hebrew language, traditionally written in a separate script. Literature in Hebrew varies between the imperial block script and the older paleo-Hebrew script, as the Dead Sea Scrolls testify. Additionally, in the second century, Christian Aramaic texts began to be written in the Syriac alphabet, a separate script used for the Syriac dialect of Aramaic, used by Christians only. Jerome conflates the Gospel of the Hebrews with the Gospel of Matthew in this text. However, even though there is an additional piece of evidence pointing towards the language, there is still considerable ambiguity if the two statements are compared together. Perhaps the second statement is a clarification of the first so that he did mean that it was written in Aramaic ("Chaldee and Syrian" language) but with Hebrew script. Jerome's comments are important because he claims to have seen the text in Caesarea.

Jerome's comments complicate our understanding of Matthew's origins in Hebrew. His remarks point to the existence of a physical text, at least in Caesarea, that he viewed and cited from in his writings. Jerome is typically thought of as having advanced Hebrew proficiency⁹³, but this might not be as clear-cut as traditionally thought.⁹⁴ If Jerome was

⁹⁰ My translation of the Curetonian Old Syriac version. The transliteration follows the Eastern vocalization scheme.

⁹¹ The rabbinic translation of Matthew into Hebrew, called the Shem Tob version of Matthew, uses 'continually'.

⁹² Williams, P. J., & Tyndale House, C. (2008). *An Evaluation of the Use of the Peshitta as a Textual Witness to Romans*. TC, 13, 3.

⁹³ Graves, M. (2007). *Jerome's Hebrew philology: a study based on his commentary on Jeremiah* (Vol. 90). Brill, pp.196–198: "In his discussion he gives clear evidence of having consulted the Hebrew himself, providing details about the Hebrew that could not have been learned from the Greek translations.

⁹⁴ Froehlich, K. (2014). *Sensing the scriptures: Aminadab's chariot and the predicament of Biblical interpretation*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing., pp. 31-32, "Jerome tells of his toil in trying the learn Hebrew and Aramaic, the sweat to translate, his consultations



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

correct, he was proficient enough to recognize the difference between block and paleo-Hebrew script, showing some literacy in the language. In both of his contributions to the question, Jerome emphasizes the use of Hebrew *characters*, while differing on the *language* used – in the first case referring to Hebrew and the second to Aramaic (“Chaldee and Syrian language”). In any case, his comments are the most detailed of any reports on the Hebrew Gospel. However, his comments alone do not establish the original existence of Matthew in Hebrew, only the existence of such a version in the fourth to fifth centuries.

Epiphanius of Salamis (d. 403 CE) also links the composition of the Gospel in Hebrew to the specific use of *Hebrew letters or alphabet*, although without any reference to the Gospel being written in Aramaic unlike Jerome. Epiphanius writes, “They have the Gospel according to Matthew in its entirety in Hebrew. For it is clear that they still preserve this as it was originally written, in the Hebrew alphabet. But I do not know whether they have also excised the genealogies from Abraham to Christ” (Panarion 29.9.4).⁹⁵ Epiphanius clarifies that the language was understood to be *Hebrew* and this was the *original* version of Matthew, which was subsequently translated into Greek. His comments indicate that the text was still used but he does not say that he has seen the text. The comment can be broken down into two claims. First, that the Nazoraean Christians have a copy of Matthew in Hebrew. Second, that they have preserved the original version of Matthew in Hebrew against the Greek version known to Epiphanius. The first claim can be easily verified. It is certain that there was a version of Matthew in Hebrew in use among the Nazoraeans. Throughout history, there were a number of translations of Matthew into Hebrew, used by rabbinic Jews in polemical attacks against Christianity, from as early as the ninth century, in the first anti-Christian Jewish polemical work, *The Book of Nestor the Priest*, with many more in the medieval period. Given the lack of any direct textual evidence earlier than the fourth century, it cannot be established that the Nazoraeans’ Gospel was the original. It is important to note that the Nazoraeans were regarded more favorably by Christian heresiologists than the other Jewish Christian groups, such as the Ebionites.⁹⁶ The positive commentary they (Eusebius, Jerome, etc.) give to their Hebrew text should be read within the context of fourth-century heresiology. That is, the ascription of antiquity to *their* Gospel text must be read as a *condemnation* of the “heretical” Jewish Christian Gospels of the Hebrews and Ebionites.

Fourth-century Christian writers add an interesting thought to the debate about the possibility of the existence of Christian literature in Semitic languages in the first century. Up to this point, it seems like that the references to the Gospel of Matthew (or the Hebrews alternatively) in Ἐβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ, could equally refer to either Hebrew *style*, linking back to the stylistic uses of *dialektos* as described by Van Rooy *or* composition in the *Hebrew language*, as Buth and

with a Jewish acquaintance (“Hebraeus meus”) who came to him by night for fear of the Jews. Yet most of this storytelling seems to be hyperbole, if not outright fabrication. Pierre Nautin voiced the suspicion two decades ago, and subsequent studies tend to confirm it: Jerome really did not know Hebrew. He certainly learned Greek well during his first stay at Antioch, where grammatical concepts, textbooks, and teachers were available for this purpose. But nothing like this existed for Hebrew, Jerome could not learn, and thus ‘know,’ Hebrew, as we define the term ‘knowing a language’—that is, having a grasp of the system of forms as well as syntax—except by living in a linguistic community where learning would happen through use. Like Aristarchos, he was a gifted philologist, curious about the meaning of words, and certainly decipher text written in Hebrew letters. He knew numerous words and phrases, and could ask about etymologies and name lore. But could one call this dilettantism ‘knowing Hebrew’? The few sections of the Vulgate that can be attributed to Jerome’s own labors are revisions of existing translations, done by comparing one or more Greek translations, and constantly consulting Origen and Eusebius. His introductions to biblical books and his treatise on the etymology of Hebrew names, which formed part of practically every medieval Bible, were compiled from the same sources and are a dubious contribution to the comprehension of the real literal sense of the Hebrew Scriptures. This does not mean that Jerome’s philological passion had no positive influence. It does suggest, however, that Jerome misled generation after generation into vastly overrating his expertise.”

⁹⁵ ἔχουσι δὲ τὸ κατὰ Ματθαῖον εὐαγγέλιον πληρέστατον **Ἐβραϊστί**. παρ’ αὐτοῖς γὰρ σαφῶς τοῦτο, καθὼς ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐγράφη, **Ἐβραϊκοῖς γράμμασιν** ἔτι σφίζεται

⁹⁶ *Panarion* 29 7:5



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Pierce conclusively show. However, the fourth-century authors place a great deal of stress on the issue of the *script* used to write the Gospel. The references in this time period make explicit mention of the “Hebrew script”, most likely referring to the Aramaic block script, now commonly associated with Hebrew, but which was still in the process of transition from the earlier paleo-Hebrew in the first century.

To give a brief description of the differences in scripts, here is an example of each script. First, the paleo-Hebrew script, then the Hebrew block script and Syriac Estrangela alphabet, with the word *Yehudah* (‘Judah’) written in each script. Recall that the Hebrew block script was originally used with Aramaic.

𐤅𐤂𐤏𐤃
יהודה
ܝܗܘܕܐ

Both Aramaic and paleo-Hebrew scripts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, without any particular theological significance ascribed to the choice of script.⁹⁷ Others⁹⁸ have argued that the use of paleo-Hebrew and Aramaic block script had theological connotations based on a reading of rabbinic sources, which states, “The Jewish people selected *Ashurit* script and the sacred tongue for the Torah scroll and left *Ivrit* script and the Aramaic tongue for the commoners” (b. Sanhedrin 21b).⁹⁹ Others have proposed the same, that the paleo-Hebrew script was used for mundane purposes.¹⁰⁰ Even among the Dead Sea Scrolls, it seems that the preference is for the block script¹⁰¹, even with a significant holdout for the paleo-Hebrew script, with books of the Torah written in that script and the name of God appearing in that script.¹⁰² Other rabbinic texts seem to support the assertion made above. The Mishnah indicates that a book written in the block script is holy and suitable for public ritual use.¹⁰³ The paleo-Hebrew script might have had nationalistic connotations, which the Rabbis sought to avoid in their reconceptualization of Jewish identity after the Roman-Jewish war.¹⁰⁴

If the use of Aramaic block script had religious significance, then it becomes much clearer to see why fourth-century Church Fathers wished to link their Hebrew Gospel traditions to the use of the sacred Aramaic block script of Hebrew. The second century CE *Apocryphon of James* also mentions writing in Hebrew letters but without a reference to Aramaic, perhaps with the same goal in mind, saying, “Since you asked me to send you a secret book which was revealed to me and Peter by the Lord, I could neither refuse you nor speak directly to you, but I have written it in **Hebrew letters** and have sent it to you – and to you alone. But inasmuch as you are a minister of the salvation of the saints, endeavor

⁹⁷ Schiffman, L (1994). *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their True Meaning for Judaism and Christianity*. New York: Doubleday, p. 176-178.

⁹⁸ Zissu, B., & Abadi, O. (2014). Paleo-Hebrew script in Jerusalem and Judea from the second century BCE through the second century CE: a reconsideration. *Journal for Semitics*, 23(2), 653-664.

⁹⁹ Translations from the Talmud come from Koren Talmud Bavli, the Noé Edition. Jerusalem: Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 1965, 2019, which includes translated text in **bold** and commentary in regular font.

¹⁰⁰ Segal, M. Z. (1951). Problems of the Dead Sea Scrolls. *Eretz-Israel*, 1, 39-44.

¹⁰¹ Tov, E. (2018). *Scribal practices and approaches reflected in the texts found in the Judean Desert* (Vol. 54). Brill, p. 225.

¹⁰² Siegel, J. P. (1971). The employment of Palaeo-Hebrew characters for the divine names at Qumran in the light of Tannaitic sources. *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 42, 159-172.

¹⁰³ Zissu and Abadi, p. 660.

¹⁰⁴ Hanson, R. S. (1964). Paleo-Hebrew Scripts in the Hasmonean Age. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 175(1), 26-42.; Deutsch, R. (2017). *Jewish Coinage During the First Revolt Against Rome: 66-73 Ap. JC*. Leshon Limudim Limited.; Regev, E. (2013). *The Hasmoneans: ideology, archaeology, identity*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

earnestly and take care not to recount this book to many – this which the Savior did not desire to recount to all of us, his twelve disciples. But blessed are those who will be saved through faith in this discourse” (Apocryphon of James). That is, the nature of the *tradition* of Matthew’s composition in Hebrew is one that shifted over time, with further details added to suit the theological needs of the audience in each subsequent generation. The tradition began as a way of emphasizing the mission to the Jews in particular the thoughts of Origen as quoted by Eusebius. Papias’ and Iraneaeus’ comments also point to the interpretation of the Hebrew version of Matthew as an appeal to apostolic succession in a sort of way by ascribing antiquity to the Gospel text and its transmission in the language of Jesus. In the fifth century, the focus has shifted to serve as a means of validating the antiquity of the Gospel of Matthew and perhaps its inherent sacrality vis-a-vis its composition in the sacred alphabet. Additionally, the appearance of the Nazoraeans, the more theologically “acceptable” Jewish Christians, for accepting the virgin birth, serves to heresiologically exclude other forms of Jewish Christianity but elevate the correct one according to proto-orthodox views and to lead authenticity and veracity to the proto-orthodox text and Matthew was particularly popular among early Christians based on the number of citations of that text in the Church Fathers.

CONCLUSIONS

The question of whether or not any Christian Gospels were written in Hebrew is left undetermined, with the caveats mentioned above; unfortunately, with the lack of any surviving manuscripts, its existence cannot be confirmed. It could easily be a *claim* not based in reality and only serving the theological needs of the proto-orthodox community of Christians. Josephus claims to have written in Hebrew/Aramaic before translating into Greek, a language in which he was not proficient;¹⁰⁵ however, no Aramaic text of Josephus’ works survives. The claim of writing in Aramaic or Hebrew might serve to add further legitimacy and antiquity to a text.

Therefore, it is proposed that the issue at hand is the *interpretation* of a tradition that goes back to the early second century CE.¹⁰⁶ The tradition is that the Gospels were written in Hebrew by Matthew before being “interpreted” by others as best they could. The veracity of these claims is impossible to ascertain, due to the lack of extant texts. However, if Christian texts existed in Semitic languages in the first century, the weight would be given to Hebrew over Aramaic, considering Buth and Pierce’s argumentation, as well as textual evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls, where only around 20% of scrolls were written in Aramaic. Additionally, Wise’s study of the Bar Kokhba letters indicates that Aramaic was associated with the mundane, especially legal affairs, and the Gospels do not belong to this genre. This strongly indicates that *if* there were a Gospel text composed in a Semitic language in the first century CE, it would have been in Hebrew, not Aramaic.

Ἑβραϊδι διαλέκτω remains ambiguous, even with the strong claims made by Buth and Pierce about the clear association of the first word with the Hebrew language against Aramaic. However, the juxtaposition of *dialektos* complicates the interpretation of the meaning of this phrase because words acquire meaning based on their proximity to each other. While this argument could be leveled against introducing ambiguity to *dialektos* when it follows *Hebrais* (and equivalents), the inherent ambiguity in *dialektos* outweighs the supposed clarity in *Hebrais*. Due to the possibility of *dialektos* having diastratic or diaphasic meaning particularly introduces the possibility of Gundry’s assertions of Ἑβραϊδι διαλέκτω meaning a particular *Hebrew* type of *dialektos*, perhaps referring to style or register.

¹⁰⁵ ...I have also taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of the Greeks, and understand the elements of the Greek language, although I have so long accustomed myself to speak our own tongue, that I cannot pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness...” (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.12.1)

¹⁰⁶ If Eusebius’ quotations of Papias are entirely accurate.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Fourth-century authors take this tradition and further interpret it. Jerome contradicts the earlier traditions, and the certainty of Buth and Pierce, by interpreting the earlier statements of the Gospel written in “Hebrew” to mean “Aramaic” written in the “Hebrew alphabet” i.e. the Aramaic block script, associated with sacred text. Epiphanius supports this but does not assert that the Gospel was written in Aramaic, but Hebrew. These authors seem to want to associate the ancient Gospel traditions (to them) of a text written in Hebrew by the Jewish apostle, Matthew, to the sacred script, even if that language was originally Aramaic. The point of clarifying the script used seems to confirm the interpretation of block script as used in sacral contexts against the paleo-Hebrew text for mundane purposes. The Aramaic phrases in the Gospels, usually introduced with a variant of the word, μεθερμηνεύω, “to translate, interpret”¹⁰⁷ serve as an appeal to authority vis-a-vis the antiquity of Judean customs. Looking at the phrases, we see they are highly fossilized, indicating a lack of any proficiency in the Aramaic language.¹⁰⁸

This suggests a trajectory of the interpretation of a tradition, which might serve as a means of establishing Christian antiquity by linking its texts to ancient and sacral languages. If Buth and Pierce’s arguments are to be accepted, it must be asserted that there was some version of a Christian Gospel in the *Hebrew language* in the first century, which was translated into Greek. However, later Christian authors viewed this tradition in a different light and used the association of Hebrew with the sacred to establish the own veracity and sacred status of their own Scriptures.

WORKS CITED

- Adan-Bayewitz, D., & Aviam, M. (1997). Iotapata, Josephus, and the siege of 67: Preliminary report on the 1992-94 seasons. *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 10, 131-165.
- Androutsopoulos, J. (2014). Linguaging when contexts collapse: Audience design in social networking. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 4, 62-73.
- Argyle, A. W. (1973). Greek among the Jews of Palestine in New Testament Times¹. *New Testament Studies*, 20(1), 87-89.
- Avigad, N. (1976). *Beth She'arim: Report on the Excavations During 1953-1958. Catacombs 12-23* (Vol. 3). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Benor, S. B. (2008). Towards a New Understanding of Jewish Language in the Twenty-First Century. *Religion Compass*, 2(6), 1062-1080.
- Birkeland, H. (1954). *The Language of Jesus*. Oslo: Jacob Dybward.
- Bock, D. L. (2002). *Studying the historical Jesus: A guide to sources and methods*. Baker Academic.
- Buth, R., & Pierce, C. (2014). 3 Hebraisti in Ancient Texts: Does Ἑβραϊστί Ever Mean “Aramaic”? In *The language environment of first-century Judaea* (pp. 66-109). Brill.
- Carmignac, J. (1987). *The Birth of the Synoptics*. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press
- Casey, M. (1999). *Aramaic sources of Mark's Gospel* (Vol. 102). Cambridge University Press.
- Casey, M. (2002). *An Aramaic approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (Vol. 122). Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰⁷ Coincidentally the same word used by the Rabbis to refer to Aramaic, *targum*.

¹⁰⁸ For example, Talitha cumi (Mark 5:35-43); Ephphatha (Mark 7:31-37); Abba (Mark 14:36);; Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani (Mark 15:34); Maran atha/ Marana tha (Didache 10:14; 1 Corinthians 16:22), etc.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

- Cassio, A. C. (1984). Il "carattere" dei dialetti greci e l'opposizione Ioni-Dori: Testimonianze antiche e teorie di età romantica (su Arist. Quint. 2. 13, Iambl. v. Pyth. 241 sgg., sch. in Dion. Thr. p. 117, 18 sgg. Hilgard). *AIQN: Annali del Dipartimento di Studi del Mondo Classico e del Mediterraneo Antico. Sezione linguistica*, 6, 113-136.
- Cassio, A. C. (1993). *Parlate locali, dialetti delle stirpi e fonti letterarie nei grammatici greci*. Ediciones de la Universidad Autónoma; Fenoglio, S. (2009). La riflessione sui dialetti nei Commentari all'Odissea di Eustazio di Tessalonica. *Quaderni del dipartimento di filologia, linguistica e tradizione classica*, 239-254.
- Chancey, M. A. (2005). *Greco-Roman culture and the Galilee of Jesus* (Vol. 134). Cambridge University Press, pp. 122-165.
- Coseriu, E. (1981). Los conceptos de dialecto, nivel y estilo de lengua y el sentido propio de la dialectología. *LEA: Lingüística española actual*, 3(1), 1-32.
- Deutsch, R. (2017). *Jewish Coinage During the First Revolt Against Rome: 66-73 Ap. JC*. Leshon Limudim Limited.
- Edwards, J. (2009). *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Ehrman, B. and Z. Plese. (2013). *The other Gospels: accounts of Jesus from outside the New Testament*. Oxford University Press.
- Fenoglio, S. (2012). *Eustazio di Tessalonica, Commentari all'Odissea: glossario dei termini grammaticali*. Edizioni dell'Orso; Lambert, F. (2009). Les noms des langues chez les Grecs. *Histoire Épistémologie Langage*, 31(2), 15-27.
- Ferguson, C. A. (1959). Diglossia. *Word*, 15(2), 325-340; Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies* (No. 1). Cambridge University Press.
- Fishman, J. A. (1971). *Sociolinguistics*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House (1971).
- Fishman, J. A. (1980). Bilingualism and biculturism as individual and societal phenomena. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1(1), 3- 15. doi:10.1080/01434632.1980.9993995.
- Fishman, J. A. (2020). Who speaks what language to whom and when? In *The bilingualism reader* (pp. 55-70). Routledge.
- Fishman, J. A., Cooper, R.L. and Newman, R.M. (1971). *Bilingualism in the barrio*. Indiana University Bloomington.
- Froehlich, K. (2014). *Sensing the scriptures: Aminadab's chariot and the predicament of Biblical interpretation*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Grabbe, L. L. (1992). Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian/Vol. 2 The Roman period. *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*.
- Graves, M. (2007). *Jerome's Hebrew philology: a study based on his commentary on Jeremiah* (Vol. 90). Brill.
- Grosjean, F. (1982). *Life with two languages: An introduction to bilingualism*. Harvard University Press.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies* (No. 1). Cambridge University Press.
- Gundry, R. H. (1964). The language milieu of first-century Palestine: its bearing on the authenticity of the gospel tradition. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 83(4), 404-408.
- Gundry, R. H. (2005). The apostolically Johannine pre-Papian tradition concerning the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. *The Old is Better*, 67-68.
- Hainsworth, J. B. (1967). Greek views of Greek dialectology. *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 66(1), 62-76.
- Hamers, J., & Blanc, M. (2000). *Bilinguality and Bilingualism* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511605796, p. 253.
- Hanson, R. S. (1964). Paleo-Hebrew Scripts in the Hasmonean Age. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 175(1), 26-42.
- Heller, M. (1995). Language, Minority Education and Gender Linking Social Justice and Power. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 5: 105-106. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.1995.5.1.105>.
- Heller, M. (2007). Bilingualism as Ideology and Practice. In: Heller, M. (eds) *Bilingualism: A Social Approach*. Palgrave Advances in Linguistics. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230596047_1.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

- Hengel, M. (2003). *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their encounter in Palestine during the early Hellenistic period*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Hezser, C. (2020). Jewish literacy and languages in first-century roman Palestine. *Orientalia*, 89(1), 58-77.
- Hoffman G (1971) Puerto Ricans in New York: A language-related ethnographic summary. In Fishman J, Cooper R and Ma R (eds), *Bilingualism in the Barrio*. Indiana University Press
- James, J. C. (1920). *The Language of Palestine and Adjacent Regions*. T. & T. Clark.
- Jørgensen, J. N., Karrebæk, M. S., Madsen, L. M., & Møller, J. S. (2015). Polylinguaging in superdiversity. In *Language and superdiversity* (pp. 147-164). Routledge.
- Kok, M. J. (2017). Did Papias of Hierapolis Use the Gospel according to the Hebrews as a Source?. *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 25(1), 29-53.
- Kürzinger, J. (1963). Irenäus und sein Zeugnis zur Sprache des Matthäusevangeliums 6. *New Testament Studies*, 10(1), 108-115.
- Mackridge, P. (2009). Mothers and daughters, roots and branches: Modern Greek perceptions of the relationship between the ancient and modern languages. *Standard languages and language standards: Greek, past and present*, 259-276.
- Møller, J. S., & Jørgensen, J. N. (2012). Enregisterment among adolescents in superdiverse Copenhagen. *Tilburg papers in culture studies*, 28, 1-15.
- Morpurgo Davies, A. (1987). The Greek notion of dialect. *Verbum*, 10(1), 2.
- Morpurgo Davies, A. (1993). Geography, history and dialect: the case of Oropos. *Dialectologica Graeca. Actas del II Coloquio Internacional de Dialectología Griega (Miraflores de la Sierra [Madrid], 19-21 de junio de 1991)*, 261-279.
- Munz, R. (1921). Über γλωττα und διάλεκτος und über ein posidonianisches Fragment bei Strabo. Ein sprachwissenschaftlich-philologischer Exkurs zu Posidonius bei Strabo C 176 über dialektische Verschiedenheiten bei den Galliern. *Glotta*, 11(1./2. H), 85-94.
- Myers-Scotton, C. (1990). Suzanne Romaine, *Bilingualism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. Pp. 337. *Language in Society*, 19(4), 557-561.
- Poplack, S. (1978). Syntactic structure and social function of code-switching, vol. 2. *Centro de Estudios Puertorriquenos, [City University of New York]*.
- Poplack, S. (1988). Contrasting patterns of code-switching in two communities. *Codeswitching: Anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives*, 48, 215-244.
- Poplack, S. (2013). "Sometimes I'll start a sentence in Spanish Y TERMINO EN ESPAÑOL": Toward a typology of code-switching. *Linguistics*, 51(s1), 11-14.
- Poplack, S., & Levey, S. (2010). Contact-induced grammatical change: A cautionary tale. *Language and space: An international handbook of linguistic variation*, 1, 391-419.
- Poplack, S., & Meechan, M. (1995). Patterns of language mixture: Nominal structure in Wolof-French and Fongbe-French bilingual discourse. *One speaker, two languages*, 199-232.
- Poplack, S. and D. Sankoff. (1984). Borrowing: the synchrony of integration. *Linguistics* 22:99-135.
- Poplack, S., D. Sankoff, & C. Miller. (1988). The social correlates and linguistic processes of lexical borrowing and assimilation. *Linguistics*, 26(1). 47-104.
- Poplack, S, L. Zentz, and N. Dion. (2012). What counts as (contact-induced) change? *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 15(2). 247-254.
- Porter, S. E. (1991). Introduction. The Greek of the New Testament as a Disputed Area of Research. *The language of the New Testament*, 11-38.
- Porter, S. E. (1993). Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?. *Tyndale Bulletin*, 44, 199-235.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

- Porter, S. E. (2003). Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament with Reference to Tense and Voice. *Studies in Biblical Greek I*, 111-56.
- Porter, S. E. (2004). Criteria for authenticity in historical-Jesus research. *Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research*, 1-306.
- Rahmani, L. Y., Rahmani, L. Y., & Sussmann, A. (1994). *A catalogue of Jewish ossuaries: in the collections of the State of Israel*. Israel Antiquities Authority.
- Regev, E. (2013). *The Hasmoneans: ideology, archaeology, identity*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Rydbeck, L. (1998). The Language of the New Testament. *Tyndale Bulletin*, 49, 361-368.
- Safrai, S. (2006). Spoken and Literary Languages in the Time of Jesus. In *Jesus' Last Week* (pp. 225-244). Brill.
- Schwartz, S. (1995). Language, power and identity in ancient Palestine. *Past & Present*, (148), 3-47.
- Schiffman, L. (1994). *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their True Meaning for Judaism and Christianity*. New York: Doubleday
- Sebba, M., Mahootian, S., & Jonsson, C. (Eds.). (2012). *Language mixing and code-switching in writing: Approaches to mixed-language written discourse*. Routledge.
- Segal, M. H. (1908). Mišnaic Hebrew and its relation to Biblical Hebrew and to Aramaic. *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 647-737.
- Segal, M. H. (2001). *A grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew*. Wipf and Stock Publishers; Rabin, C. (1958). The historical background of Qumran Hebrew. *ScrHier* 4, 144-161.
- Segal, M. Z. (1951). Problems of the Dead Sea Scrolls. *Eretz-Israel*, 1, 39-44.
- Siegel, J. P. (1971). The employment of Palaeo-Hebrew characters for the divine names at Qumran in the light of Tannaitic sources. *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 42, 159-172.
- Sim, D. C. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew, John the elder and the Papias tradition: A response to RH Gundry. *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 63(1), 283-299.
- Smelik, W. (2010). The Languages of Roman Palestine, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. C. Hezser. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 122-41.
- Tov, E. (2018). *Scribal practices and approaches reflected in the texts found in the Judean Desert* (Vol. 54). Brill.
- Tribulato, O. (2014). "Dialectology (diálektos), Ancient Theories of". In *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics*, edited by G. K. Giannakis, 1:457-461. Leiden: Brill.
- Van Canghai, J. (2005). *L'Évangile de Marc : un original hébreu?*. Bruxelles: Editions Safran.
- Van Rooy, R. (2016). "What is a 'dialect'?" Some new perspectives on the history of the term διάλεκτος and its interpretations in ancient Greece and Byzantium. *Glotta*, 92(1), 244-279.
- Versteegh, C. H. M. (1986). "Latinitas, Hellenismos, 'Arabiyya". *Historiographia Linguistica* 13 (2-3): p. 431-432.
- Williams, P. J., & Tyndale House, C. (2008). An Evaluation of the Use of the Peshitta as a Textual Witness to Romans. *TC*, 13, 3.
- Wise, M. O. (2015). *Language and Literacy in Roman Judaea: A Study of the Bar Kokhba Documents*. Yale University Press.
- Zissu, B., & Abadi, O. (2014). Paleo-Hebrew script in Jerusalem and Judea from the second century BCE through the second century CE: a reconsideration. *Journal for Semitics*, 23(2), 653-664.



WHERE THE LINE IS DRAWN: TRAUMA AND NARRATIVE IN THE *HISTORIES OF AGATHIAS*¹

Keenan Baca-Winters, Ph.D.
(Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA)

Correspondence should be addressed to kbacawint@gmail.com

Date Submitted: 16 March 2023

Accepted following review: 27 April 2023

First published online 30 April 2023

Abstract

This paper proposes a radical departure from previous studies of Agathias, an under-studied Late Antique author who offers us a unique perspective of the 6th century when we consider the milieu in which he wrote his Histories. Agathias, this paper argues, exhibited signs of trauma from the news of constant warfare in Italy and the Caucasus and the barbarian raids on Constantinople, all of which he tried to process and resolve by creating a narrative, which was filled with inconsistencies and moralizing tangents. Agathias' Histories is more than his impartial and accurate retelling of events; it is his attempt to make sense of his trauma with the written word.

Keywords: *Agathias, Khosrow I, Justinian, Trauma, Narrative, Memory*

In the preface of his *Histories*, the poet and advocate Agathias of Myrma laid bare the aim and purpose of his work:

Seeing that in my own lifetime it has come to pass that great wars have broken out unexpectedly in many parts of the world, that wholesale migrations of barbarian peoples have taken place, that bewildering vicissitudes of fortune have occurred and unforeseeable and incredible events which in their outcome have upset all calculation, that nations have been wiped out, cities enslaved, populations uprooted and displaced so that all mankind has been involved in the upheaval; seeing therefore that these and similar things had taken place I was seized with vague misgivings and felt that it might be altogether reprehensible if I, for my part, were to pass over in silence and fail to record such staggering and

¹ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of *The Independent Scholar* for their positive feedback, as well my students, Lucca Ogushi and Ian Armijo-Gay, for their most helpful suggestions on earlier versions of this article, and my colleague, Jessie Poggi, for expanding my understanding of trauma and narrative.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

momentous occurrences, occurrences which might well have a positive value for posterity. I decided therefore that it was not out of place for me to try my hand at history.²

On the surface, Agathias' aim is simple: Events of enormous magnitude happened in his lifetime with negative consequences affecting all humanity, and he sought to better the world by documenting the events of his time for posterity. More importantly, however, in his preface, we can detect that the calamities of which Agathias spoke had left a mark upon him and how he viewed the world.

This paper argues that the events documented in Agathias' *Histories* shed light on the trauma he faced during the 6th century CE, which is a radical departure from previous studies of Agathias. Constant warfare between the Roman Empire and its enemies in Italy, North Africa, the Iberian peninsula, and *Ērānšahr* (the Sasanian Empire) characterized this era, events that could have negatively affected some people who lived through it. Therefore, Agathias' narrative is not just a document of events, but a testament to how he processed his trauma with the written word. As Nigel C. Hunt explains, "A common way for many people to deal with their traumatic memories is to write them down as a story; this, for some, is an effective way of dealing with memories."³ In other words, creating a narrative of one's experiences allows one to deal with what happened and why. The key to understanding Agathias is to realize that the events of his time affected him profoundly and negatively affected his life, which bled into his work with his inconsistencies, moralizing observations, and judgments. Before we proceed, this paper uses Ron Eyerman's definition of trauma: "The impact of shocking occurrences which profoundly affect an individual's life," an emotional shock so powerful that it breaches "the mind's experience of time, self and the world."⁴ What is more, Peter A. Levine, in his groundbreaking *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*, notes that shock trauma "occurs when we experience potentially life-threatening events that overwhelm our capacities to respond effectively."⁵ Levine continues that "traumatic symptoms are not caused by the 'triggering' event itself. They stem from the frozen residue of energy that has not been resolved and discharged; this residue remains trapped in the nervous system where it can wreak havoc on our bodies and spirits."⁶ It is this stagnant psychic "energy" that Agathias had to work out of his system by creating a narrative to resolve his trauma.

A paper such as this is essential because Procopius of Caesaria, Agathias' immediate predecessor, has received significant attention from scholars throughout the years, while Agathias has gotten comparable little. 1970 saw the publication of *Agathias* by Averil Cameron, in which she argued that Agathias was Christian and a poor historian.⁷ Cameron then continued her work on Agathias in her seminal paper, "Agathias on the Sasanians," in which she attempted to sort out fact from fiction in Agathias' portrayal of Iranian history.⁸ Anthony Kaldellis wrote "Agathias on History and Poetry" in 1997, arguing that Agathias constructed "highly nuanced images in the course of [his] narratives, and of cleverly using classical allusions to make innovative philosophical arguments."⁹ Then, in 1999, Kaldellis wrote an article in response to Cameron's book, "The Historical and Religious Views of Agathias: A Reinterpretation," in which he argues that Agathias is not, in fact, Christian¹⁰ and deftly illuminates the complexity of Agathias as a human being.¹¹ In 2003, Kaldellis published his article, "Things are Not What They Are: Agathias 'Mythistoricus' and the Last Laugh of Classical Culture," in which he examines the influence of the classical past, tinged with allusions of mythical characters, on Agathias and his work.¹²

² Agathias, 1975, pp. 4–5.

³ Hunt, 2010, p. 161.

⁴ Eyerman, 2013, pp. 41–42.

⁵ Levine, 1997, p. 37.

⁶ Levine, 1997, pp. 51, 255.

⁷ Eyerman, 2013, p. 101.

⁸ Cameron, 1969/1970, p. 69.

⁹ Kaldellis, 1997, pp. 295–296.

¹⁰ Kaldellis, 1999, p. 249.

¹¹ Kaldellis, 1999, pp. 207, 252.

¹² Kaldellis, 2003, pp. 295–300.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Michael Maas, also in 2003, wrote “‘Delivered from their Ancient Customs:’ Christianity and the Question of Cultural Change in Early Byzantine Ethnography,” in which he proved that Agathias considered the barbarians were becoming “civilized” by adapting Roman cultural practices.¹³ Warren Treadgold’s 2007 monograph, *The Early Byzantine Historians*, offers a biography of Agathias and criticizes his skills as a historian.¹⁴ In 2010, Begoña Ortega Villaro published “Some Characteristics of the Works of Agathias: Morality and Satire.” She examined how Agathias mixed poetry and history to demonstrate his complex point of view.¹⁵ Scott McDonough’s 2011 article, “Were the Sasanians Barbarians? Roman

z Writers on the ‘Empire of the Persians’” examines why Agathias hated the Iranians with such a passion, as he is one of the most important sources we have on ancient Iranian history.¹⁶ In 2013, Anthony Kaldellis published his book, *Ethnography After Antiquity: Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature*, in which he examines Agathias’ efforts to be an “objective” ethnographer, especially of the Iranians.¹⁷ Finally, in 2020, Marco Cristini performed a philological study of Agathias’ work in the article, “Frankish ἀρμυσταί in Lucca? Reading Agathias Hist. 1.18.5.”¹⁸ This paper seeks to illuminate further Agathias and his importance as a source for Late Antique studies by studying him through a trauma-informed lens to understand why there are inconsistencies and moralizing judgments in his work.

Reservations about this methodology are understandable. Agathias is not alive to tell us his thoughts and feelings as he wrote his historical narrative; nor does this paper seek to understand the truth of Agathias’ *Histories*. This paper attempts to illuminate an under-studied area of Late Antique research: the emotions of people who lived in eras of such historical importance. Researchers in the past have shunned areas of inquiry like this to focus on uncovering the truth, a truly noble endeavor. This paper, however, seeks to bring Agathias and his potential emotional state into the limelight to underscore how complex and terrifying the events of Late Antiquity could have been to those who lived through them. As such, this paper examines events and attempts to understand how Agathias may have interpreted the truth as he saw it, which may contradict the established historical narrative. This paper does not seek to undermine or challenge what other historians have written about Agathias; instead, it studies Agathias himself as a human being and what he may have experienced and the emotions he may have felt. Agathias was not an abstraction; he was flesh and blood and had thoughts and fears and desires and complexities that influenced how he viewed the world and he wrote about it. The fact that the events of his time may have traumatized Agathias shows us how human beings throughout time have been intimately connected to the wider zeitgeist much like you and me, which makes the past more alive. We as historians should focus more on these potential areas of research.

Agathias is the prime candidate to study Late Antiquity through a trauma-informed lens; while he was a trained lawyer and poet in sixth-century Constantinople, he was not part of the literary elite;¹⁹ nor did he personally witness many of the events he described.²⁰ Agathias was an ordinary person reacting to the news of his time—and the network to share news and information was extensive through eyewitness reports, imperial *communiqués* and propaganda, and rumors²¹—and it is the constant news of those events that traumatized Agathias. What is more, as a civilian during a time of constant warfare, Agathias had little to no control over his situation, unlike a soldier in combat,²² and he was inundated with a stream of horrific news from abroad without recourse. According to Hunt, the lack of control in stressful situations, as in the case of Agathias, triggers an individual’s traumatic response, which supports Levine’s hypothesis

¹³ Maas, 2003, pp. 171–174.

¹⁴ Treadgold, 2007a, pp. 279–290.

¹⁵ Ortega Villaro, 2010, p. 287.

¹⁶ McDonough, 2011b, p. 55.

¹⁷ Kaldellis, 2013, p. 29.

¹⁸ Cristini, 2020, pp. 163–164.

¹⁹ McDonough, 2011b, p. 59.

²⁰ Cameron, 1970, pp. 39–44.

²¹ For the modes of communication in the ancient world, see Graham, 2006, pp. 79–101; Ando, 2000, pp. 73–130, 207, 253–256.

²² For more on this nexus in trauma studies, see Hunt, 2010, pp. 114, 125.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

of stagnant psychic energy affecting traumatized people.²³ The only way to process this trauma and pain was for Agathias to create a narrative to make sense of what traumatized him, a drive that all human beings share. As Levine states, “The drive to complete and heal trauma is as powerful and tenacious as the symptoms it creates. The urge to resolve trauma through re-enactment can be severe and compulsive. We are inextricably drawn into situations that replicate the original trauma in both obvious and unobvious ways.”²⁴

Because Agathias had created his narrative to pass on the pain²⁵ onto the pages of his work, he did not shy away from nakedly inserting his personal opinions and moral judgments in his *Histories*.²⁶ He was able to moralize and judge the events of his time because he was not attempting to be impartial; he was trying to make sense of his world and his trauma. This context has been missing in previous studies of Agathias because previous scholars have found him lacking as a historian, which colored how they interpreted Agathias’ use as a primary source. These inconsistencies and moralizing tendencies can be explained by examining how the events of Agathias’ era affected him as he wrote his *Histories*. At least one scholar, Thomas Sizgorich, has brilliantly described Agathias’ narrative “as much as confession as imperialist fantasy.”²⁷ This observation is the foundation for the argument of this present article: Agathias’ work is unique among Late Antique historians; his narrative of events, which may or may not present the absolute truth of what happened, demonstrates how the events of his time could affect his psyche and mental health.

Agathias began his *Histories* by examining the situation in Italy. Emperor Justinian I’s (r. 527–565) twenty year-effort to restore Italy to the Roman Empire and to impose orthodox Christianity in Europe was seemingly successful. The last Ostrogothic king of Italy, Teias, was killed in the Battle of Mons Lactarius in 552 in his last attempt to drive the Romans back to the sea. According to Procopius, the war in Italy was over.²⁸ Agathias, however, had a different opinion on the matter and offered his reader the following observation that things are not all well in the world:

This turn of events led everyone to suppose that the fighting in Italy had been brought to a successful conclusion: in reality it had scarcely begun. I am convinced, for my part, that our generation shall see no end to such ills, since, human nature, being what it is, they are a permanent and ever increasing phenomenon and, indeed, one which is practically old as man himself... I do not think it is right... to hold the Divinity responsible for fighting and bloodshed. No, I could never put forward or accept the view that a benevolent being, which is the negation of all evil, could delight in wholesale slaughter. **It is the souls of men that lapse voluntarily into greed and violence and fill every land with wars and dissensions, giving rise thereby to widespread destruction, to the uprooting of whole nations and to countless other horrors.**²⁹

The effect of Agathias’ language is striking. Here, Agathias is reacting to events that had a long history before he wrote those words. The war in Italy, at this point, had been raging for almost twenty years, and people paid the price of that war in blood, as other Late Antique authors have also observed. Theophanes Confessor wrote that during this time, “neither war nor death stopped weighing on men”³⁰ and that Justinian’s armies brought “horror and ruin” to Italy.³¹ Procopius, in his *Anecdota*, wrote, “a myriad myriads of myriads perished”³² because of Justinian’s actions and “during his reign the whole earth was constantly drenched with human blood shed by both the Romans and practically all the barbarians.”³³ The effects of Justinian’s efforts in Italy left their mark upon later authors, and, most immediately, Agathias. For instance, when the Goths captured Milan from the Romans and razed it to the ground in 539, they also

²³ Hunt, 2010, p. 11.

²⁴ Levine, 1997, p. 305; Kraemer, 2015, p. 59.

²⁵ For the “Law of Pain,” see Dawes, 2013, p. 153.

²⁶ Cameron, 1970, pp. 33, 39–44–49, 53–56; Kaldellis, 1999, p. 208; Kaldellis, 1997, p. 305; Kaldellis, 2013, pp. 23, 71.

²⁷ Sizgorich, 2006, p. 176.

²⁸ Procopius, 2006b, 8.35.7–38.

²⁹ Agathias, 1975, 1.1.2,4–5.

³⁰ Theophanes Confessor, 1997, AM 6026.

³¹ Sizgorich, 2006, p. 170.

³² Procopius, 2006a, 18.4.

³³ Procopius, 2006a, 18.30.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

massacred over three hundred thousand males and enslaved all the women in the city.³⁴ The Romans, in turn, committed the same atrocities in Naples in 536, when they, too, slaughtered and enslaved indiscriminately³⁵ after having captured the city. Rome itself had been reduced to rubble due to the intense fighting.³⁶ These are the events to which Agathias alluded in his preface and the events with which he mentally grappled. For Agathias, one seemingly successful battle could not end the bloodshed in Italy.

Based on his evocative imagery, Agathias may not have found inspiration in the Roman Empire's actions in Italy, even after the Romans soundly defeated the Ostrogoths in 554; he may have had the opposite reaction due to the protracted nature of this seemingly endless war. This phenomenon is common. In their respective studies on Procopius, Michael Stewart and Anthony Kaldellis have proven that Procopius, too, had let emotion bleed into his work as he became frustrated with the bungling of Justinian's war to reconquer Italy.³⁷ As for Agathias, after Roman forces annihilated the barbarians at the Battle of the Volturnus, he wrote that the Romans buried their dead, plundered the enemy's camp, and returned to Rome, singing of their victory. At Capua, Agathias noted, "as far as the outlying districts presented the spectacle of fields running with blood and the riverside flooded with an overflow of corpses."³⁸

It is crucial to consider the *milieu* in which Agathias wrote his narrative. By the time Agathias wrote his *Histories*, the Roman military had been fighting not only in Italy but also in North Africa, Spain, Asia Minor, and the Caucasus,³⁹ all of which harmed Agathias emotionally and colored how he approached his work; especially one of the worst disasters in Roman history, which occurred in Agathias' lifetime. In 540, the armies of Xusrō I (r. 531–579), *šahanšah* of the Iranians, destroyed Antioch and captured its residents, sending shockwaves throughout the Roman Empire.⁴⁰ The spread of rumors and graphic stories of victories, defeats, death, and ruin overseas, circulating the Roman world, had left a horrible mark upon Agathias' psyche. The images of the traumatic events around him would have been indelibly etched upon his memory, which would color his narrative when he wrote it. Let us consider the Iranians, the Romans' greatest threat and rivals, and turn our gaze to Lazica and the Roman-Iranian war over it, as it takes up considerable space in Agathias' *Histories*.

Lazica was located in modern-day Georgia in the Caucasus, the rugged, mountainous region between eastern Europe and the Middle East. The Romans and Iranians had both spent time, money, and blood to control the region and its access points to vast trade networks,⁴¹ gold and silver deposits,⁴² and to prevent invasions by the other side.⁴³ Whoever controlled the Caucasus could control the entire ancient Mediterranean world. Before the *Histories* the Romans and Iranians negotiated the so-called "Endless Peace" in 532 after the Iberian War (526–531), a conflict over the Caucasus and Mesopotamia. At the very least, the "Endless Peace" stipulated that the Romans and Iranians would view each other as partners in the Caucasus. This truce was broken in 541 with the outbreak of the Lazic War.⁴⁴

Lazica had been a client state of the Romans at least two decades before the war and had practiced Christian orthodoxy with the Romans; that, however, changed due to Roman pressure,⁴⁵ mismanagement,⁴⁶ and mistreatment of the local populace,⁴⁷ all of which led to elements of the Lazi to defect to the Iranians. Xusrō I was overjoyed at the prospect of

³⁴ Procopius, 2006b, 6.21.39–49; Pohl, 2006, pp. 16, 20.

³⁵ Procopius, 2006b, 5.10.29; Pohl, 2006, pp. 16–17; Stewart and Lillington-Martin, 2021, pp. 292–293.

³⁶ Stewart, 2020, pp. 20–21.

³⁷ Stewart, 2020, pp. 58–59 and Kaldellis, 2010, pp. 257–260.

³⁸ Agathias, 1975, 2.10.8.

³⁹ For Justinian's wars, see Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen, 2017, pp. 277–279; Evans, 2000, pp. 126–157.

⁴⁰ A point to which I shall return. See Count Marcellinus, 1995, 2; John Malalas, 1986, 18.87; Greatrex, 2005, p. 489; Dignas and Winter, 2007, p. 109; Treadgold, 2007b, pp. 193–194; Firdausi, 1915a, 13.

⁴¹ Braund, 1991, pp. 222–224; Braund, 2004, pp. 40–42, 58, 65.

⁴² Haldon, 2005, p. 33; Braund, 2004, p. 43.

⁴³ Braund, 2004, p. 273.

⁴⁴ Procopius, 2006b, 8.4.5. For an overview of the Lazic War, see Braund, 2004, pp. 268–314.

⁴⁵ Kruse, 2013, p. 871.

⁴⁶ Cameron, 1970, p. 128; Braund, 2004, p. 292.

⁴⁷ Theophanes Confessor, 1997, AM 6046; Procopius, 2006b, 2.15.6; Procopius, 2006b, 8.16.2–4; Braund, 1991, p. 223; Dignas and



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

annexing more territory in the strategic Caucasus,⁴⁸ for he, too, understood its importance as an invasion point of the Roman Empire,⁴⁹ and Emperor Justinian was terrified at the prospect of losing Lazica for that very reason.⁵⁰

The Romans blundered their way through Lazica to retake it while the Iranians further entrenched themselves. Then, John and Rusticus, brothers who both held the rank of general, accused the Lazi king Gubazes II (r. 541–555) of personally betraying the Romans. John and Rusticus then murdered Gubazes II during a botched arrest attempt, further straining Roman-Lazic relations.⁵¹ Any lingering feelings of affection among the Lazi evaporated, and the Roman war effort in Lazica halted after the disastrous Battle of Onoguris (c. 554). Amid this volatile situation, however, the Lazi buckled under life with their Zoroastrian allies, the Iranians, and then defected back to the Romans, their co-religionists.⁵² In order to ameliorate the Lazis' feelings and to ensure that they would not switch sides again and endanger the Roman Empire to a potential Iranian invasion from Lazica,⁵³ Justinian named Gubazes' brother, Tzath II (r. 555),⁵⁴ as king of the Lazi and dispatched a senator named Athanasius to bring the murders of Gubazes to justice.⁵⁵

How Agathias depicted the trial of John and Rusticus is of particular importance because he demonstrated subtle observations that betray how he interpreted this event. Imagine Athanasius, decked in Roman imperial regalia, bringing centuries of Roman legal tradition and *gravitas* to Lazica to try his compatriots for the murder of a vassal king.

Arranged before Athanasius is the prosecution and the defendants, John and Rusticus. Then the trial begins with the prosecution's opening statements. Agathias depicts the prosecutor, an unknown Lazi, as arguing before the court, "The Colchian state [Lazica] is in ruins, indeed it would be more accurate to say, "The Empire is in ruins...." The stability and integrity of your regime has been destroyed and your own power is sadly weakened as a result."⁵⁶ Here, Agathias, using the words of the Lazi prosecutor, critiques the state of the Roman Empire; his empire is in ruins because of the constant war and the actions of his compatriots when they assassinated a foreign king, which resulted in the prolonging of the Lazic War and more dead.

John and Rusticus gave their defense. Neither man denied murdering Gubazes but instead testified that they did kill the king and would "depart from this life comforted and fortified for our journey into the hereafter by the conscious certainty that we have left the Romans still in full possession of their Cochian [Lazic] domains."⁵⁷ The defendants continued: Gubazes' "intention was to undermine as best he could the widespread belief among foreign people concerning the triumphant and invincible might of the Emperor,"⁵⁸ and that what they did was for the common good of the Roman Empire.⁵⁹

Winter, 2007, p. 40.

⁴⁸ Braund, 2004, p. 295. The Sasanian dynasty lost a foothold in the Caucasus when many Armenians converted to Christianity in AD 301 and were eager to reestablish a foothold in that region. See McDonough, 2011, p. 301.

⁴⁹ Procopius, 2006b, 8.7.13, 8.12.17.

⁵⁰ Agathias, 1975, 2.18.7; Procopius, 2006b, 8.15.11–12; Kruse, 2013, p. 870. For Justinian's attempts at fortifying the Caucasus, see Procopius, 2006c, 3.3.9–14, 3.6.1–26, 3.6.5–9; Howard-Johnston, 1989, pp. 214–219; Greatrex, 2005, p. 487; Treadgold, 2007b, p. 193.

⁵¹ Agathias, 1975, 3.4.1–6.

⁵² Agathias, 1975, 3.14.1. For the Lazi shifting alliances between the Romans and Iranians, see Heather, 2018, p. 226; Sizgorich, 2006, p. 168; Greatrex, 2005, pp. 496–498; Evans, 2000, pp. 91–94, 156–168; Braund, 2004, p. 271. For a brief history of Christianity in Georgia, see Rapp, 2014, pp. 3–6; for tensions between Christian Georgia, Lazica, and Zoroastrian *Ērānšahr*, see 83–85.

⁵³ Sizgorich, 2006, p. 169; Braund, 2004, p. 297.

⁵⁴ Agathias, 1975, 3.15.2.

⁵⁵ Agathias, 1975, 3.14.4.

⁵⁶ Agathias, 1975, 4.3.4.

⁵⁷ Agathias, 1975, 4.7.5.

⁵⁸ Agathias, 1975, 4.9.3.

⁵⁹ Agathias, 1975, 4.10.5.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Because of the precarious situation in Lazica—Justinian could ill afford to lose the support of a Caucasian people when he had Italy to pacify, and the ever-present Iranian threat—Athanasius judged the evidence and ordered the beheadings of John and Rusticus. The following paragraph suggests that not all was well in Lazica and in Agathias' mind after the verdict's execution. John and Rusticus were paraded around on mules while a herald proclaimed their crimes, giving the Lazi the spectacle of the regicides' humiliation. Agathias noted that the Lazi were impressed with the sight until John and Rusticus' decapitation, as "everyone was moved to pity and forgot his resentment."⁶⁰

Agathias then moves his reader along with alacrity, without a chance to reflect because another crisis in the Caucasus awaits. The Misimians, another Caucasian tribe, observed the Roman and Iranian war for Lazica, and they decided to ally themselves with the Iranians to prevent their annexation into the Roman Empire.⁶¹ Načoragān, the Iranian *spahbed* (general) in charge of the war effort in the Caucasus, gladly received the Misimians' offer of friendship. The Romans, however, sent envoys to the Misimians to entice them to their side. The Misimians murdered the envoys and started ambushing Roman patrols, acts that Agathias called "criminal folly,"⁶² which the Romans could not let go unanswered. The degree of fervor, however, with which the Romans retaliated against the Misimians moved Agathias to pity.

The Romans raided the Misimians' fort, catching the barbarians by surprise in their sleep. Agathias describes the Romans cutting down waves and waves of Misimians as they tried to leave their houses during the commotion. Women were not spared, including one who took a spear in the belly, reaping "the reward of their menfolk's treachery."⁶³ During the slaughter, the Romans began setting torches to the fort, which lit it up like a beacon in the dead of night. Those who stayed indoors were burned alive, while the Romans killed those who escaped the flames.⁶⁴ It is not hard to imagine this scene: The burning fort, turning night into day, and the screams of the Misimians piercing the air as the Romans did their deadly work.

Agathias reports the raid clinically because, as he admits, Misimians did breach acceptable behavior by killing the envoys. War is messy, and sometimes innocent people die; Agathias is not a romantic idealist, and he knew that the Romans had to answer in kind the Misimians' provocations. Agathias continued with the following observation, suggesting that he disagreed with the Romans' behavior during the raid. The following shocked Agathias, provoking something within him that he had to process:

Many children were seized sobbing and crying out for their mothers. Some they [the Romans] hurled down and mangled brutally against the rocks. Others they tossed in the air, as they were playing some sort of game, and caught them on the points of their spears. Now it was understandable that the Romans should have been enraged with the Misimians people... **Nevertheless their fury was disproportionate and they should not have acted with such wonton and monstrous brutality towards newborn babies who had no understanding of their parents' crimes.**⁶⁵

As a result of the raid, 'the entire nation had come close to extinction.'⁶⁶

The deaths of the Misimian children seem to have greatly troubled Agathias, and for a good reason. According to James Dawes,

It is hard to contemplate the murder of children, especially for those who have raised them. The difficulty is, in part, emotional. Children are so vulnerable, everything animal in us rises up to protect them. Moreover, children represent a category of personhood that is, uniquely, both conceptually clear and universal. Not everyone understands what it means to be "a soldier," "Japanese," or "a woman," for

⁶⁰ Agathias, 1975, 4.11.4.

⁶¹ Agathias, 1975, 4.12.4–7.

⁶² Agathias, 1975, 4.16.1.

⁶³ Agathias, 1975, 4.19.1.

⁶⁴ Agathias, 1975, 4.19.1–5.

⁶⁵ Agathias, 1975, 4.19.5–6. Author's emphasis.

⁶⁶ Agathias, 1975, 4.20.7.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

instance, but everyone has experienced—from the inside—what it means to be “a child.” The difficulty of contemplating the killing of children is more than emotional in these ways, however.⁶⁷

If Dawes is correct, then the murder of Misimian children would have affected Agathias greatly due to the universal understanding of what it means to be a child. As such, the violent deaths of these children compelled Agathias to memorialize them and to judge and condemn those who violently and callously ended their lives. An impartial recapitulation of events was out of the question for Agathias because the murder of these children moved and affected him.

Perhaps the best quotation from the *Histories* that demonstrates how Agathias felt about the constant state of warfare that characterized his time alive, and the bloodshed that accompanies it, is from the following exchange between *Spahbed* Načoragān and the Roman general Martin during a parley at the height of the Lazic War:

You are such a shrewd and able general... yet far from showing any inclination to stop the two monarchs [Justinian and Xusrō I] from engaging in mutually exhausting conflict you have allowed them to persist in the protracted ruination of their respective states.⁶⁸

Agathias lays the blame for the constant fighting between the Romans and the Iranians at the feet of Emperor Justinian and *Šahanšah* Xusrō I. The actions, decisions, and constant machinations of these two men in the zero-sum game of empires—in which blood was the price to be paid for more territory, money, and prestige, always at the expense of someone else—were driving the actions of the Roman Empire and *Ērānšahr*. Recall that Agathias' aims, as admitted in his preface, were to accurately record the events of his time, including the annihilation of cities, the deaths of thousands, and the razing of entire cities. The murder of Misimian children is what Agathias alluded to in his preface, but to write about trauma to process is sometimes not enough, and someone has to take the blame for the deaths of those Misimian children and everyone else who suffered during this period.

It has been well documented that Agathias did not hold the Iranians in high regard; he was a citizen of the Roman Empire and was well aware of the centuries of conflict between it and *Ērānšahr*. Scott McDonough has deftly surmised that Agathias' hatred of the Iranians was a reaction to his contemporaries who were ambivalent about the Iranians or even admired them.⁶⁹ Agathias laser-focus on Xusrō I, however, suggests something more substantial exists to his hatred of the Iranians than simply criticizing his contemporaries.

Xusrō I was rumored to be a lover of literature and philosophy, a fact confirmed by other sources, both Iranian and Roman.⁷⁰ Agathias himself, however, could not allow himself to believe such a thing about Xusrō I and took the opportunity to mock him. A certain braggart and sophist by the name of Uranius, who would spend evenings debating with his friends in a glib, pseudo-intellectual fashion, managed to find himself in Xusrō I's court.⁷¹ Uranius donned robes and a sober expression on his face, and then engaged Xusrō I in a question-and-answer session about the origin of the physical world, the nature of infinity, and other philosophical topics, which amazed Xusrō I because he had never met his “equal” in philosophical discourse.⁷² Agathias used Uranius as a way to undermine Xusrō I's intelligence and insult him. Because Uranius, a charlatan and fast-talker, could dupe Xusrō I, the *šahanšah* was a fool for admiring him.⁷³

Then, a group of Neo-Platonist philosophers arrived in Xusrō I's court after fleeing Justinian's attempts to suppress paganism in the Roman Empire.⁷⁴ Those philosophers were drawn to *Ērānšahr* by rumors of Xusrō I's erudition and

⁶⁷ Dawes, 2013, pp. 102–103.

⁶⁸ Agathias, 1975, 3.19.2.

⁶⁹ McDonough, 2011b, pp. 55–65.

⁷⁰ Agathias, 1975, 2.28.1. For Xusrō I's love of philosophy, please see Daryaei, 2009, p. 29; Daryaei, 2008, pp. 74–76; Dignas and Winter, 2007, pp. 263–265.

⁷¹ For Agathias' overall treatment of Uranius, see Cameron, 1970, pp. 104–105.

⁷² Agathias, 1975, 2.29.9–11 and 2.30.1–3. The *Shahnameh*, the Iranian national epic poem, features numerous examples of philosophical debates in Xusrō I's court with the *šahanšah* actively participating; see Firdausi, 1915b, 1–8.

⁷³ Cameron, 1969/1970, p. 114.

⁷⁴ For Justinian's pagan persecution, see Wildberg, 2005, pp. 330–333; Evans, 2000, pp. 67–70; Treadgold, 2007b, p. 180.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

sense of justice with his rule.⁷⁵ When these men finally reached *Ērānšahr*, however, according to Agathias, they were dumbfounded at the supposed lawlessness, oppressive rule, and sexual promiscuity among the Iranians; these philosophers immediately regretted leaving the Roman Empire.⁷⁶ Agathias again further emphasizes Xusrō I's lack of intelligence when he wrote that the philosophers found conversing with the *šahanšah* disappointing due to his superficial knowledge. It was apparently so bad in Xusrō I's court that the philosophers returned home to the Roman Empire to face almost certain death at the hands of zealous Christians rather than engage in intellectual discourse with Xusrō I.⁷⁷

On one level, Agathias' Xusrō I is a comical buffoon. Agathias put these details of Xusrō I's lack of awareness as comic relief for the reader of his *Histories* to counterbalance the details of death and destruction that pepper his narrative.⁷⁸ It is perhaps one of the few ways Agathias could bring justice to a man responsible for so much of his trauma.

Agathias, however, wanted to do more than just mock Xusrō I; he had to remind his reader that the *šahanšah* was himself prone to acts of cruelty. Recall Načoragān, the commander-in-chief of Iranian forces in the Caucasus. During the Lazic War, the Romans defeated the Iranians at the Battle of Phasis (566), and Načoragān fled with his army to Iberia in humiliation.⁷⁹ Upon hearing the news, Xusrō I summoned Načoragān to Ctesiphon, the Iranian imperial capital, so that he could punish the general for his cowardice. Načoragān was supposedly skinned alive, in one piece, from his neck to feet; the skin was inflated like a wineskin and hung on display,⁸⁰ a practice that originated with *Šahanšah Šābūhr I* (r. AD 240–AD 270), according to Agathias.⁸¹ Here, Agathias is again bringing his reader's attention to the violence that Xusrō I was capable of committing, highlighting the barbarian nature of the *šahanšah* to undercut his legacy.

Other authors in Late Antiquity have noted Xusrō I's alleged cruelty. For instance, Xusrō I ordered one of his generals in Armenia to "extirpate the men... to root out, dig out, exterminate and mercilessly destroy the land."⁸² Also, during the Sasanian-Axumite wars over Yemen, Xusrō I ordered another general "not to leave alive in Yemen a single black, nor the child of an Arab woman by a black, whether young or old, nor to leave alive a single man with crisp and curly hair in whose generation the blacks had been involved," an order the general executed.⁸³ The Baluchi, too, suffered the same fate when Xusrō I ordered his army to exterminate the tribe in retaliation for raiding *Ērānšahr*. According to the poet Ferdowsī, "So mighty was the slaughter in the land that all the region's face was bathed in blood."⁸⁴ Other incidents, too, suggest that Xusrō I's temper led to the deaths of several of his subordinates. For example, Xusrō I had reformed the Iranian land tax system; according to al-Ṭabarī, a secretary objected to his reforms, and Xusrō I ordered his fellows to beat him to death with their ink holders. After the secretary's murder, there were no other objections.⁸⁵

Writing about Načoragān's death allowed Agathias to process this grisly story and an attempt to banish it from his psyche. Agathias here highlights that the foreign monarch, who was locked in a bitter struggle with the Romans for territory and prestige, who "freed Iran from fear" through his victories over Iran's enemies,⁸⁶ was also personally

⁷⁵ Agathias, 1975, 2.30.3. For Xusrō I's sense of justice, see Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, 1999, pp. 154–157; Firdausī, 1915a, 3, 8, and 12.

⁷⁶ Agathias, 1975, 2.30.5–7.

⁷⁷ Agathias, 1975, 2.31.1–2.

⁷⁸ Hilarity at the cost of accuracy is typical amongst the works of Justinian's age. The point has also been raised concerning Procopius' similar treatment of the empress Theodora, the wife of Justinian. See Stewart, 2020, pp 67.

⁷⁹ Agathias, 1975, 3.19.–28.10.

⁸⁰ Agathias, 1975, 4.23.2–3.

⁸¹ Šābūhr I, it should be noted, allegedly had Emperor Valerian (r. AD 253–AD 260) executed and displayed similarly. It is debated if Valerian died in such a way or if Lactantius was propagandizing Iranian malevolence. See Lactantius, 1899, 5; Agathias, 1975, 4.23.7.

⁸² Sebeos, 1999, p. 9.

⁸³ Al-Ṭabarī, 1999, p. 251.

⁸⁴ Firdausī, 1915a, 7.

⁸⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, 1999, p. 257.

⁸⁶ *The Bundahišn*, 2020, 33.24; Daryaei, 2021, pp. 194–195. See also Al-Ṭabarī, 1999, p. 160; Firdausī, 1915a, 4–6.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

responsible for committing acts of extreme violence and barbarity. Agathias wanted to tear down the image that Xusrō I had built of himself over the years. That Agathias hated Xusrō I should not surprise anyone. Xusrō I's forces destroyed Antioch in 540, and Agathias wrote his *Histories* in the milieu of Antioch's destruction. Procopius' observations indicate the heightened emotional reaction to the city's fall:

I become dizzy as I write of such a great calamity and transmit it to future times, and I am unable to understand why indeed it is the will of God to exalt in high the misfortunes of a man or of a place, and then to cast them down and destroy them for no cause which appears to us. For it is wrong to say that with Him all things are not always done with reason, though he then endured to see Antioch brought down to the ground at the hands of a most unholy man, a city whose beauty and grandeur in every respect could not even so be utterly concealed.⁸⁷

Procopius' musings on the fall of Antioch suggest that the event left a mark on those who lived through it, including Agathias himself.

Xusrō I is but one part of the puzzle in understanding the full context and deeper meaning of Agathias and his work. While the Lazic War had ended, more horrors awaited Agathias, which reveals the persistent nature of the traumatizing events he experienced. The Tzani raided Roman forts, a dreadful earthquake struck Constantinople, spreading fear and terror with every shake of the ground, and a wave of the bubonic plague killed thousands of people.⁸⁸ Agathias wrote that this period "was followed by others of an equally horrifying and alarming nature"⁸⁹ in which the Kutrigurs, a nomadic Turkic people, rampaged in a show of force, striking Constantinople itself. Agathias tells us the horrors of this raid:

Finding themselves unopposed, the Cortrigurs [Kutrigurs] plundered and ravaged the land without mercy. They seized quantities of booty and took a huge number of prisoners. Among the captives many ladies of noble birth who had chosen a life of chastity were cruelly dragged away and suffered the worst of all misfortunes, being forced to serve as the instruments of unbridled lust. Some of them had from their youth renounced marriage together with the love of material things and the cares of worldly society... Even these were forcibly abducted from their cells and brutally raped. And many married women who happened to be pregnant at the time were dragged away too. Then, when their babies were due, they gave birth to them on the march, unable to enjoy the privacy of a normal confinement or even to pick up and wrap the new-born babes. In spite of everything they were hauled along and hardly given time even to feel their pain, while the wretched infants were abandoned and torn to pieces by dogs and birds, as they had been brought into the world expressly for this and had tasted life in vain.⁹⁰

Agathias' words seem to cry out for justice for those women and babies; it is not hard to imagine him grappling with the mental images of what these people endured at the hands of the Kutrigurs. James Dawes explains the human urge to narrate atrocities. He helps to shed light on Agathias and his trauma and his need to shine a light on the victims of the Kurtigur raid: "The argument that we must bear witness to atrocity, that we must tell the stories... because we are morally bound to do so."⁹¹ If Dawes is any indication, Agathias felt a similar pull to record the experiences of the Kurigurs' victims and to discover why they had to suffer such tribulations. Agathias then turned his attention toward Emperor Justinian.

Recall that for Xusrō I, Agathias chose to highlight the *šahanšah's* supposed idiocy, cruelty, and barbarity; with Justinian, Agathias blames Justinian's apathy and attention to matters far away from the Empire that led to the Kutrigurs' devastating raid. According to Agathias, no sentries were available upon the defensive walls that protected

⁸⁷ Procopius, 2006b, 2.10.4–5; Dignas and Winter, 2007, pp. 108–109. A contemporary of Procopius, John Lydus, also called Xusrō I an "evil genius" for invading Roman territory and sacking Antioch. See John Lydus, 1982, 3.54. For John Lydus's postulations on the cause of the sacking of Antioch, see Maas, 1992, p. 108.

⁸⁸ Agathias, 1975, 5.10.1–7. For more information on "Justinian's Plague," see Allen, 1979, pp. 5–20; Horden, 2005, pp. 135–156; Evans, 2000, pp. 34, 160–165. For an eyewitness account of the effects of the plague, see Evagrius Scholasticus, 2000, 4.29–30.

⁸⁹ Agathias, 1975, 5.11.1.

⁹⁰ Agathias, 1975, 5.13.1–4. See also Theophanes Confessor, 1997, AM 6051.

⁹¹ Dawes, 2013, p. 8.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Constantinople⁹² and Roman armies were too bogged down, stationed in Italy, North Africa, Spain, Lazica, and on the Iranian frontier, to effectively defend the capital.⁹³ According to Agathias, imperial officials sensed Justinian's alleged apathy towards the military. So these corrupted officials began cheating soldiers out of their pay, leading to the desertion of entire garrisons.⁹⁴ Then, the only personnel that were available to defend the terror-stricken denizens of Constantinople⁹⁵ were the *Scholarii*, a once elite unit of bodyguards for the emperor who had degenerated into a band of civilians who dressed like military officers and performed ceremonial duties at court.⁹⁶ In the midst of this, the Kutrigurs were ravaging the countryside, and the "citizens of Constantinople were... conjuring up the horrors of a siege, the burnings, the scarcity of foodstuffs and finally the walls being breached."⁹⁷

The terror of those in Constantinople, including Agathias himself, was nothing new for them; they had recently witnessed the horrors and destructive violence of the Nika riots and the thousands of people killed to suppress the insurrection,⁹⁸ and they, too, knew of Roman military operations abroad. However, this fear of the Kutrigurs was more palpable and acute for them because an immediate barbarian threat was endangering their safety. At this point in the narrative, Agathias drove events into a crescendo of suspense; he wants his reader to fear and panic like those people watching the Kutrigurs ravaging the countryside, waiting for them to breach the walls of Constantinople.

Agathias then, however, abruptly switches gears in his narrative from terror to hope. The climax of the *Histories*, surprisingly, is one of relief instead of trauma. Justinian ordered General Belisarius to repel the Kurtrigurs, which he successfully did.⁹⁹ After the Kutrigurs returned, however, another general named Germanus managed to repel them conclusively. Justinian then paid the Kutrigurs to cease hostilities,¹⁰⁰ which they accepted. Soon after, they left the borders of the Roman Empire. At the same time, Justinian began laying the groundwork of a disinformation campaign, playing the Kutrigurs and the Utigers, another Turkic nomadic group, against one another so they could destroy each other and leave the Romans in peace. Here, Agathias praise Justinian's plan:

The complete annihilation of these two peoples occurred at a later date, so that I shall do my best to preserve a strict chronological order and provide a detailed account of this event in its proper place. When the dissension between the Cortrigurs [Kutrigurs] and Utigurs was still at its height the news of what had happened reached Constantinople and the wisdom and foresight of the Emperor was clearly and amply demonstrated to all. The barbarians were destroying one another whilst he without restoring to arms was, thanks to his brilliant diplomacy, the ultimate victor and was bound to profit whatever the outcome of the fighting. And so since they were continually embroiled in internal troubles they no longer had any idea of attacking the domain of the Romans, and indeed they sank into an almost total obscurity.¹⁰¹

This passage is the abrupt end of Agathias' *Histories* in which he exalted his emperor's decisions, despite criticizing him earlier, an about-turn for Agathias because he blamed Justinian and his decisions for leading to the suffering of untold numbers of people. However, Agathias stresses that Justinian's policy of paying off Rome's enemies was successful because two nomadic tribes were killing each other instead of harassing the Empire.

⁹² Agathias, 1975, 5.13.6.

⁹³ Agathias, 1975, 5.13.8.

⁹⁴ Agathias, 1975, 5.14.2–5. For Justinian himself suspending his soldiers' pay, see Procopius, 2006a, 18.11, 22.7, 24.2–6; Sewart and Lillinton-Martin, 2021, pp. 281, 300–304; Treadgold, 2007b, pp. 182, 188–193, 199, 207.

⁹⁵ Agathias, 1975, 5.14.6–8.

⁹⁶ Agathias, 1975, 5.15.2; Evans, 2000, p. 254.

⁹⁷ Agathias, 1975, 5.14.6.

⁹⁸ For an overview of the Nika Riots and the aftermath, see *Chronicon Paschale*, 1989, 531; Theophanes Confessor, 1997, AM 6024; Evans, 2000, pp. 119–123; Treadgold, 2007b, p. 181.

⁹⁹ For Agathias' treatment of Belisarius, see Cameron, 1970, pp. 49–50.

¹⁰⁰ Agathias, 1975, 5.23.7.

¹⁰¹ Agathias, 1975, 5.25.5–6 See also Menander the Guardsman, 1985, 5.2.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

When concluding his *Histories*, Agathias seemed to want to highlight something positive and hopeful. Recall that in the prologue, Agathias informed his audience that he would give an accurate account of time, including all of its horrors. Throughout the entire narrative, Agathias fulfilled his promise, but he emphasized something different at the end. He could not maintain the endurance necessary to keep focusing on the horror; it is as if he purposefully ended his *Histories* optimistically to bring hope and resolution to his reader. Here, Agathias has cut off his narrative, declaring to his reader that it is done because he declared it to be, and all is well.¹⁰² Agathias abruptly ended his story because the trauma that affected him and plagued him was now on the page and was no longer plaguing his psyche. The past, which can become stuck in one's present due to trauma,¹⁰³ haunted Agathias no longer. According to Nigel Hunt, "Recovery from trauma means making sense of it all again, learning to understand the world as it is in the light of the traumatic event, incorporating the new trauma-related information into one's own narratives,"¹⁰⁴ which may explain the tonal shift of the *Histories*. Agathias, in other words, reached the "Integration" phase of his narrative in which

Discrepancies, contradictions and inconsistencies are eventually resolved, and the various narrative elements are synthesised into a unified life story. Although complexity, ambiguity and differentiation may be used to indicate suspense, conflict or growth, the narrative ultimately reconciles these disparate story elements with one another.¹⁰⁵

Regarding Agathias, this quote demonstrates that after completing his narrative, Agathias no longer had to touch the darkness of the human condition, which was the point of writing his *Histories*; he had purged that darkness, and how his narrative is done. The events that had haunted him were resolved, and that stagnant psychic "energy" of trauma had dissipated.

Others have used the power of narrative to exorcize their traumatic demons. Like Agathias, they sought to understand their trauma by writing it down as a narrative. The list is extensive. James Dawes, in his book *Evil Men*, describes how after interviewing Japanese war criminals, who had committed atrocities in the Second World War, including members of the infamous Unit 731, began "saying inappropriate things at inappropriate times in inappropriate ways" to people about the war criminals' stories when he came back home to the United States. Only after processing and writing down what he had heard into a narrative to get it out of his head did Dawes find a resolution to the trauma of hearing those men's stories.¹⁰⁶ American author and professor Norman Maclean wrote his semi-autobiographical short story, "A River Runs Through It," to better understand his brother as a person and the circumstances of his murder.¹⁰⁷ Navajo poet Lucy Tapahonso's body of work is inspired by the stories she heard from her family about the trauma of the Navajo people's collective past. In particular, she composed the poem "In 1864" as a meditation on the stories she heard from her family about the Long Walk of the Navajo, in which the American government forcibly relocated the Navajo people to Bosque Redondo, an inhospitable and desolate area in western New Mexico where one can hear the "pain and cries of his relatives/the confused and battered spirits of his own existence."¹⁰⁸ Israeli filmmaker Ari Folman made the 2008 rotoscoped documentary *Waltz with Bashir* to fill in the gaps in his memory of his experience as a soldier in the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.¹⁰⁹ After interviewing his fellow veterans and trauma specialists, Folman's breakthrough happens. At the film's end, he remembers and comes to terms with his presence at the Sabra and Shatila Massacre, in which Christian Phalangists murdered 3500 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.¹¹⁰ Across time and space, people who have experienced traumatic events, events that disrupted their lives and left a mark on their psyche, created narratives and stories of that trauma in order to understand better what had happened in order to exorcise the demons of the past.

¹⁰² According to Hunt, the author of a narrative has total control in deciding how to tell the story, no matter how illogical it may seem. See Hunt, 2010, pp. 115, 125–126.

¹⁰³ Hunt, 2010, p. 108.

¹⁰⁴ Hunt, 2010, p. 126.

¹⁰⁵ Hunt, 2010, p. 130.

¹⁰⁶ Dawes, 2013, pp. 182–183.

¹⁰⁷ Maclean, 1976, p. 104; Maclean, 2008, p. 352.

¹⁰⁸ Tapahonso, 1993, p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ Kraemer, 2015, p. 59.

¹¹⁰ Kraemer, 2015, p. 65.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

This is the primary purpose as to why Agathias wrote his *Histories*, with all of his moralizing judgments, contradictions, and inconsistencies that came along with it.

Levine has also noted that when it comes to resolving trauma by narrative creation, the truth does not necessarily matter when the ultimate goal is to heal. Instead, the human mind, according to Levine, evokes traumatic experiences and other images to create a rhythmic pulsation between trauma and healing to “synthesize a new reality while discharging and healing [the] traumatic reaction.”¹¹¹ Agathias, in his attempt to write a history, inserted his judgments into the narrative to ultimately understand what traumatized him, which in turn stretched the truth of his *Histories*. What we do not know, however, is how Agathias would have treated the events that happened closer to the time in which he wrote his work, for he died after writing about Justinian’s disinformation campaigns. Nevertheless, Agathias’ pessimistic view of human nature and the horrors of the world he mentioned in his preface proved more prophetic than he would ever know.

After Agathias’ work ended, the cycle of devastation started anew.¹¹² Justinian’s successor, Justin II (r. 565–578), suspended payoffs to the Iranians and barbarian tribes, causing fury and anger on their part.¹¹³ Then, the Caucasus again was a point of contention between the Romans and Iranians, as the two empires began fighting over the status of Suania, a client kingdom of Lazica.¹¹⁴ It seems that Agathias was correct at the beginning of his *Histories* when he wrote that violence is as old as humanity itself; it will continue on and on, while people who had nothing to do with its machinations would suffer and feel its effects.

WORKS CITED

Ancient Sources

- Abū Ja’far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (1999). *The History of al-Ṭabarī: An Annotated Translation: Volume V, The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen* (C. E. Bosworth, Trans.). New York : State University of New York Press.
- Agathias (1975). *Agathias: The Histories* (J. Frendo, Trans.). Berlin : Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110826944>.
- The Bundahišn: The Zoroastrian Book of Creation*. (2020). (D. Agostini & S. Thrope, Ed & Trans.). Oxford : Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190879044.001.0001>.
- Chronicon Pascale, 284–628 AD: Translated with Notes and Introduction by Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby*. (1989). (M. & M. Whitby, Trans.). Liverpool : Liverpool University Press. <https://doi.org/10.3828/9780853230960>.
- Count Marcellinus (1995). *The Chronicle of Marcellinus: A Translation and Commentary (with a Reproduction of Mommsen’s Edition of the Text)* (Brian Croke, Trans.). Sydney : Australian Association for Byzantine Studies.
- Evagrius Scholasticus (2000). *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus* (M. Whitby, Ed. & Trans.). Liverpool : Liverpool University Press. <https://doi.org/10.3828/9780853236054>.
- Firdausī. (1915a). Nūshīrwān. In A.G. Warner & E. Warner (Trans.), *The Shāhnāma of Firdausī* (Vol. 7). London : Kagan Paul, Trench, Trüber & Co. LTD. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315012506>.

¹¹¹ Levine, 1997, pp. 358–369.

¹¹² Cameron, 1970, pp. 9, 11.

¹¹³ Menander the Guardsman, 1985, 12.6; Evans, 2000, pp. 264–265; Treadgold, 2007b, pp. 219, 222.

¹¹⁴ For the background to this war, see Menander the Guardsman, 1985, 6.1, 9.1; Evans, 2000, p. 259; Braund, 2004, pp. 311–314; Daryaei, 2009, p. 31.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

- Firdausí. (1915b). The Story of Búzurjmíhr and the Seven Banquets of Núshírwán. In A.G. Warner & E. Warner (Trans.), *The Sháhnáma of Firdausí* (Vol. 7). London : Kagan Paul, Trench, Trüber & Co. LTD.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315012506>.
- John Lydus (1983). *Ioannes Lydus: On Powers or The Magistracies of the Roman State* (A.C. Brandy, Trans.). Philadelphia : The American Philosophical Society.
- John Malalas (1986). *The Chronicle of John Malalas: A Translation* (E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys, R. Scott, B. Croke, J. Ferber, S. Franklin, A. James, D. Kelly, A. Moffatt, & A. Nixon, Trans.). Melbourne : Australian Association for Byzantine Studies.
- Lactantius. (1899). Of the Manner in which the Persecutors Died. In A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Trans.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Vol. 7). New York : The Christian Literature Company.
- Menander the Guardsman (1985). *The History of Menander the Guardsman: Introductory Essay, Text, Translation, and Historiographical Notes* (R.C. Blockley, Ed. & Trans.). Liverpool : Francis Cairns.
- Procopius. (2006a). *Anecdota, or Secret History* (H.B. Dewey, Trans.). Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press.
https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.procopius-anecdota_secret_history.1935.
- Procopius. (2006b). *History of the Wars* (H.B. Dewey, Trans.). Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press.
https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.procopius-history_wars.1914.
- Procopius. (2006c). *Buildings/General Index* (H.B. Dewey, Trans.). Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.procopius-buildings.1940>.
- Sebeos (1999). *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos: Part 1. Translation and Notes* (R. W. Thomson, Ed. and Trans.). Liverpool : Liverpool University Press. <https://doi.org/10.3828/9780853235644>.
- Theophanes Confessor (1997). *The Chronicle of Theophanes* (C. Mango, R. Scott with G. Greatrex, Ed. and Trans.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Modern and Secondary Sources

- Allen, P. (1979). The "Justinianic" Plague. *Byzantion*, 49, 5–20.
- Ando, C. (2000). *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*. Berkeley and Los Angeles : University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520923720>.
- Braund, D. (1991). Procopius on the Economy of Lazica. *The Classical Quarterly*, 41 (1), 221–225.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009838800003682>.
- Braund, D. (2004). *Georgia in Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia, 550 BC–AD 562*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Cameron, A. (1969/1970). Agathias on the Sasanians. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 23/24, 67–183.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1291291>.
- Cameron, A. (1970). *Agathias*. Oxford : Clarendon Press.
- Cristini, M. (2020). Frankish ἀμποσταί in Lucca? Reading Agathias *Hist.* 1.18.5. *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 60 (1), 158–164.
- Daryaei, T. (2008). *Sasanian Iran (224–651 CE): Portrait of a Late Antique Empire*. Costa Mesa, CA : Mazda Publishers.
- Daryaei, T. (2009). *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris.
- Daryaei, T. (2021). "The Maker of the World without Fear:" Observations on the Gold Coin of Khosrow I. In M. Faghfoury (Ed.), *Ancient Iranian Numismatics: In Memory of David Sellwood* (pp. 193–196). Boston : Brill.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004460720>.
- Dawes, J. (2013). *Evil Men*. Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press.
- Dignas, B. and E. Winter. (2007). *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511619182>.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

- Evans, J.A.S. (2000). *The Age of Justinian: The Circumstances of Imperial Power*. London and New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203133033>.
- Eyerman, R. (2013). Social Theory and Trauma. *Acta Sociologica* 56, (1), 41–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699312461035>
- Graham, M. (2006). *News and Frontiers Consciousness in the Late Roman Empire*. Ann Arbor : The University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.66756>
- Greatrex, G. (2005). Byzantium and the East in the Sixth Century. In M. Maas (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (pp. 477–509). Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521817463>.
- Haldon, J. (2005). Economy and Administration: How did the Empire Work?. In M. Maas (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (pp. 28–59). Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521817463>.
- Heather, P. (2018). *Rome Resurgent: War and Empire in the Age of Justinian*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Horden, P. (2005). Mediterranean Plague in the Age of Justinian. In M. Maas (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (pp. 134–160). Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521817463>.
- Howard-Johnston, J. (1989.) Procopius, Roman defences north of the Taurus and the new fortress of Citharizon. In D. H. French and C. S. Lightfoot (Eds.), *The Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire (BAR Int Ser. 553)* (pp. 203–229). Oxford : British Archaeology Reports (Reprinted from "Procopius, Roman defences north of the Taurus and the new fortress of Citharizon", 2006, *East Rome, Sasanian Persia and the End of Antiquity: Historiographical and Historical Studies*. Aldershot : Ashgate Variorum).
- Hunt, N. (2010). *Memory, War and Trauma*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511845017>.
- Kaldellis, A. (1997). Agathias on History and Poetry, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 38, (3), 295–305.
- Kaldellis, A. (1999). The Historical and Religious Views of Agathias: A Reinterpretation. *Byzantion* 69, (1), 206–252.
- Kaldellis, A. (2003). Things are Not What They Are: Agathias 'Mythistoricus' and the Last Laugh of Classical Culture. *The Classical Quarterly* 53, (1), 295–300. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/53.1.295>.
- Kaldellis, A. (2010). Procopius' Persian War: A Thematic and Literary Analysis. In Ruth Macrides (Ed.), *History as Literature in Byzantium* (pp. 253–273). London and New York : Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315253305>.
- Kaldellis, A. (2013). *Ethnography After Antiquity: Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature*. Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812208405>.
- Kraemer, J. (2015). *Waltz with Bashir* (2008): Trauma and Representation in the Animated Documentary. *Journal of Film and Video* 67, (3–4), 57–68. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jfilmvideo.67.3-4.0057>.
- Kruse, M. (2013). The Speech of the Armenians in Procopius: Justinian's Foreign Policy and the Transition between Books 1 and 2 of the *Wars*. *The Classical Quarterly* 63, (2), 866–881. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009838813000335>.
- Levine, P. with A. Frederick. (1997). *Waking the Tiger: Healing from Trauma*. Berkeley : North Atlantic Books.
- Maas, M. (1992). *John Lydus and the Roman Past: Antiquarianism and Politics in the Age of Justinian*. London : Routledge.
- Maas, M. (2010). 'Delivered from Their Ancient Customs' Christianity and the Question of Cultural Change in Early Byzantine Ethnography. In K. Mills and A. Grafton (Eds.), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing* (pp. 152–188). Rochester, NY : University of Rochester.
- Maclean, N. (1976). A River Runs Through It. In *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*, 1–104. Chicago : University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/9780226472232>.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

- Maclean, N. (2008). An Incident. In O. Alan Weltzien (Ed.), *The Norman Maclean Reader: Essays, Letters, and Other Writings by the Author of A River Runs Through It and Other Stories* (pp. 345–381). Chicago : University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226500317.001.0001>.
- McDonough, S. (2011a). The Legs of the Throne: Kings, Elites, and the Subjects in Sasanian Iran. In J. Arnason and K. Raadlaub (Eds.), *The Roman Empire in Context: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (pp. 290–321). Hoboken, NJ : Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444390186>.
- McDonough, S. (2011b). Were the Sasanians Barbarians? Roman Writers on the “Empire of the Persians.” In R. Mathisen and D. Shanzer (Eds.), *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World: Cultural Interaction and the Creation of Identity in Late Antiquity* (pp. 55–66). Farnham, UK : Ashgate Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315606880>.
- Ortega Villaro, B. (2010). “Some Characteristics of the Works of Agathias: Morality and Satire.” *Acta Antiqua* 50, 267–287. <https://doi.org/10.1556/AAnt.50.2010.2-3.8>.
- Pohl, W. (2006). Perceptions of Barbarians. In H.A. Drake (Ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, (pp. 15–26). London and NewYork : Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315235004>.
- Rapp Jr., S. (2014). *The Sasanian World Through Georgian Eyes: Caucasia and the Iranian Commonwealth in Late Antique Georgian Literature*. London and New York : Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315553139>.
- Sarris, P. (2006). *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511496387>.
- Sizgorich, T. (2006). Reasoned Violence and Shifty Frontiers: Shared Victory in the Late Roman East. In H.A. Drake (Ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices* (pp. 167–176). London and NewYork : Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315235004>.
- Stewart, M. (2020). *Masculinity, Identity, and Power Politics in the Age of Justinian*. Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048540259>.
- Stewart, M. and C. Lillington-Martin. (2021). “Turning Traitor: Shifting Loyalties in Procopius’ Gothic Wars.” *Byzantina Symmeikta* 31, 281–305. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.26164>.
- Tapahonso, L. (1993). In 1864. In *Sáanii Dahataaŋ, The Women Are Singing: Poems and Stories* (pp. 7–8). Tucson : University of Arizona Press.
- Treadgold, W. (2007a). *The Early Byzantine Historians*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Treadgold, W. (2007b). *A History of Byzantine State and Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Van Hoof, L. and P. Van Nuffelen. (2017). “The Historiography of Crisis: Cassiodorus and Justinian in mid-sixth-century Constantinople.” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 107, 275–300. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075435817000284>.
- Wildberg, C. (2005). Philosophy in the Age of Justinian. In Michael Maas (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (pp. 316–340). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521817463>.



TITUS AND OTHER JESUS MISSIONARIES ON CRETE: ENCOUNTERING THE LEGACY OF THE GODDESS

Valerie A. Abrahamsen, Th.D.
(Brattleboro, Vermont, USA)

Correspondence should be addressed to: <https://www.wisdomwordspdf.org/contact/>

Date submitted: 30 August 2023

Accepted following revisions: 28 December 2023

First published online: 28 December 2023

Abstract

Examining Titus as an example of an early missionary of the Jesus movement can help us learn more about that movement on Crete. Crete, as home to a peaceful goddess-centered civilization dating to the Neolithic era, offers an important perspective on the social and religious background behind the New Testament (NT) texts; the goddess and god cults that existed in the early Roman Imperial era would have been encountered by the early Jesus followers and belie the traditional narrative that polytheists were automatically attracted to the new movement. Reliance on archaeological evidence in conjunction with texts has only recently been explored in NT scholarship, but examining Titus from this perspective shows that veneration of ancient deities, especially goddesses, and the involvement of women remained strong and viable for centuries. This perspective paints a truer picture of the ancient environment and the trajectory of Christian growth.

Keywords: St. Titus, St. Paul, early church, Judaism, Jesus movement, Pastoral Epistles, Crete, Greece, Roman Empire, Graeco-Roman religion

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the Rev. Dr. Lise Sparrow and the anonymous *TIS* reviewers for invaluable feedback on this article and to Dr. Amanda Haste for her generous assistance throughout the review process.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

INTRODUCTION

"I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order
what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town,
as I directed you" (Titus 1:5 NRSV)

Titus – known from several passages in the New (Christian) Testament (NT) and the letter in his name – traveled widely on behalf of the nascent Jesus movement. The main locale with which he is associated is the island of Crete, mentioned in Acts 27 and Titus 1; in Christian lore, Titus is known as the island's first bishop. There is almost no NT scholarship examining in detail the Graeco-Roman cults that Titus, his contemporaries and his immediate successors would have encountered. Rather, Christian tradition exalts Titus, other Jesus followers and the mainline church as the rightful winners in the conflicts with traditional deities. The Orthodox Church of Crete, for example, asserts that "Christianity encountered strong resistance from the Nations [Graeco-Roman groups] on Crete. During Emperor Decius' persecution (249-251 A.D.) a group of ten Christian men suffered martyrdom; they are the Ten Callinica Holy Martyrs of Crete, and the glory of the island."¹

While traditional Christian history, based on NT texts, promotes the ministry of Titus and other men of the movement that worshiped a male God and the man Jesus, called the Christ, the rich archaeological record – and several often-overlooked NT passages – enlarges our understanding of the island's heritage into the arena of female deities and women. The record from the Bronze Age includes remains from the temple complexes at Knossos, Phaestos and Mallia that have become very well known since the efforts of famed archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans in the early 20th century.² Archaeological finds also include circular and vaulted tombs and the jewels, sealstones and votive offerings buried in them, all of which testify to the worship of a powerful female deity.³ Even earlier finds from the Neolithic era, which are less well known to the general public, demonstrate the longevity not only of the veneration of a goddess but also how that veneration created a vibrant, peaceful civilization for thousands of years and a generally high regard for women, including women in leadership roles.⁴

Prehistoric remains on Crete would not have been present during the Roman Empire due to widespread destruction by an earthquake around 1450 BCE,⁵ which begs the question: what can we actually know from the archaeological record centuries later when the Jesus movement took hold? Which Graeco-Roman deities were prominent? Did a goddess cult still attract devotees who would have interacted with members of the Jesus groups? Did women hold leadership roles in the Graeco-Roman cults, and if so, how did that situation impact leadership in the Jesus groups?

Examination of the polytheistic environment in Cretan locales visited by the early Jesus missionaries expands our knowledge of what became the Christian church. Examining especially the roles of female deities and leaders in these locales is important to complement the traditional narrative of primarily male leadership and membership as Christianity grew. The Jesus movement of the Roman Imperial era was diverse and vibrant, which is well illustrated and revealing when both textual and archaeological evidence is utilized.

¹ <http://orthodoxcrete.com/en/the-church-of-crete/>, accessed March 2023.

² While Evans designated these buildings as palaces, the term "palace" is incorrect according to more recent studies. It is more accurate to consider these complexes to be "religious-administrative-economic complexes," thus more properly termed "temple complexes" (Marija Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, edited and supplemented by Miriam Robbins Dexter [Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999; first paperback printing, 2001], 134).

³ John Bowman, *A Guide to Crete* (London: Pantheon Books, 1962), 72-74. See also Nanno Marinatos, *Minoan Religion: Ritual, Image, and Symbol* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993) 147-66.

⁴ Marija Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, ed. Joan Marler (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1991) 342-46.

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Crete/Government-and-society>, accessed March 2023.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

WHO WAS TITUS?

We can glean information about Titus from several NT passages. The most trustworthy are those from the authentic Pauline letters, written between 50 and 60 CE: Galatians 2:1ff and several examples from 2 Corinthians: 2:13; 7:6-7, 13-15; 8:1-6, 16-23; and 12:18.⁶ Less reliable are references from two of the so-called Pastoral Epistles – 2 Timothy 4:10 and the Letter to Titus – and from Acts of the Apostles, but respected scholarship can still aid us in gleaning important information.

In Galatians 2:1ff, Paul relates that, after 14 years, he went again to Jerusalem, accompanied by Barnabas and Titus.⁷ These verses refer to the controversy between Jesus missionaries who wanted to convert Jews versus those, like Paul, who felt called to minister to non-Jews. Paul notes that Titus “was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.”⁸ The passage goes on to relate that Cephas (Peter), a pillar of the early movement who had agreed to allow Paul to preach to non-Jews, joined Paul in Antioch but became a hypocrite by stopping to eat with Gentiles “for fear of the circumcision faction.” This led to Barnabas venturing in a different direction than Paul (it is not clear from Paul’s authentic letters and the accounts in Acts what the nature of the relationship between Paul and Barnabas actually was later, although the relationship seems positive in 1 Cor 9:5-6).

Paul also refers to Titus in 2 Corinthians 2, 7 and 8. Scholars have determined that 2 Corinthians is a letter comprised of several letters written by Paul, which causes some of the narrative to be disconnected and sometimes confusing.⁹ However, information can still be teased out. In 2 Corinthians 2:12-13, Paul travels to Troas in Asia Minor to proclaim the Jesus message. However, he is disturbed because Titus is not present, so he departs and travels to Macedonia. There, Paul takes great comfort from the work of Jesus followers in those communities and, in addition, from “the joy of Titus, because his mind has been set at rest by all of you” (2 Cor 7:5-16 NRSV). Paul indicates that he has boasted about Titus in the past, that Titus in turn was gladdened by the Macedonians’ obedience and that they “welcomed him with fear and trembling.”

2 Corinthians 8 and 9 – which are most likely two separate letters to two different regions in Achaia¹⁰ – focus on the collection for the poor in Jerusalem, which is significant in the history of the Jesus movement and in relation to Titus’ role. Paul writes to the Macedonian Jesus groups about the grace of God, a “severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant

⁶ The dates of documents that inform our knowledge of the early Jesus movement and Christianity are crucial. Dates have been determined by decades of work by experts in the fields of classical literature, linguistics, Graeco-Roman history, archaeology and so on. Dating makes an enormous difference not only in theological perspective but also, for instance, in how women were viewed and what their roles were. Scholarly research has determined which letters attributed to Paul are authentic and which are not. See, for instance, Margaret Y. MacDonald, “Reading Real Women Through the Undisputed Letters of Paul,” in Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D’Angelo, eds., *Women and Christian Origins* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 199-220; and L. Michael White, *From Jesus to Christianity* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2004), 143-68. See also <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/>, accessed November 1, 2023; and John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus’s Apostle Opposed Rome’s Empire with God’s Kingdom* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2004), 105-06.

⁷ It is unclear as to the date from which the 14 years is understood. See Shaye J.D.Cohen, “The Letter of Paul to the Galatians,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011), 335.

⁸ The word “Greek,” “Hellene,” means a non-Jew, a Gentile or a polytheist (<https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/hellen>, accessed March 2023).

⁹ Alan J. Avery-Peck, “The Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians,” in Levine and Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 315.

¹⁰ Avery-Peck, “Second Letter,” 325.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

joy and their extreme poverty [that] have overflowed in a wealth of generosity" (2 Cor 8:1-6 NRSV). They had given generously to the poor in Jerusalem; Titus had already begun this important collection task and was now completing it.

In verses 16-23 of 2 Corinthians 8, Paul rejoices in Titus' eagerness for those Jesus followers, praising them for not only accepting Paul's appeal but taking added initiative with the Macedonians. Paul refers to another "brother" in the ministry whom he is sending to them, then mentions Titus again as "my partner and co-worker in your service."¹¹

In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul relates his own mystical experiences, how he has asked God to remove his physical impediment, how he boasts of his weaknesses "so that the power of Christ may dwell in" him, and how he is planning a third visit to the Corinthians. Paul mentions Titus again, in verse 18, saying, "I urged Titus to go [to oversee the collection], and sent the brother with him."¹² Titus did not take advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves with the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?"

When we seek information about Titus from the Pastoral Letters/Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) and Acts of the Apostles, we must consider recent scholarship about the authorship and dates of these works. Most mainstream scholars date the Pastorals to between the late first century and 100-150 CE,¹³ based on external and internal evidence – long after Paul's death around 64 CE.¹⁴ In the case of Acts, which is the second of a two-volume work by Luke (author of the Gospel by that name) that describes the Jesus movement in its early decades, there has long been debate not only about its date but also its historical reliability and genre. Despite familiarity with such things as authentic place names, "in several instances the information presented in Acts contradicts what we know from other sources, including the letters of Paul." Furthermore, "[w]hatever historical information may be present in Acts, the selection of events, their ordering, the content of the speeches, and many of the details were determined by the theological and literary interests of the author."¹⁵ The late scholar Richard Pervo, who has produced one of the most comprehensive treatments of the dating of Acts, concluded that the most likely date is 115 CE.¹⁶

¹¹ It is unknown to whom Paul refers by the designation "brother."

¹² This appears to be a different "brother" from the one mentioned in 2 Cor 8:18, which suggests that Titus was accompanied by two male Jesus missionaries. See Avery-Peck, "Second Letter," 330.

¹³ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/>, accessed November 1, 2023. J.C. Beker, "Pastoral letters, The" in George Arthur Buttrick, Dictionary Editor, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, 668-75 (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), summarized the scholarship up to that point and maintained, first, that "the vocabulary [of the letters] stands ... decisively against Pauline authorship" and "It seems impossible to fit the situation which the Pastorals describe anywhere in the life of Paul as described in Acts [of the Apostles] and the Pauline letters" (670). Beker, relying on "the great majority of scholars," dated the Pastorals to the early second century (671). Three decades later, Robert J., Karris, OFM, "Pastoral letters, The," in Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds. *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 573-76 (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), came to similar conclusions. He too summarized prevailing theories about authorship and concluded that the Pastorals date from approximately 85 CE: the letters were written under the name of Paul but after his death. See also Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 105-06.

¹⁴ Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 401.

¹⁵ Gary Gilbert, "Acts of the Apostles," in Levine and Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 197. Gilbert dates Acts to the early second century.

¹⁶ Richard I. Pervo, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2006), 346. Pervo debates many scholars in the more traditional, and often evangelical, strand of scholarship, such as I. Howard Marshall, author of several books on Luke and Acts, who dates both Luke and Acts to ca. 70 CE; see Pervo, 179, 225, 340, 418 n. 162, and 430 n. 142. Pervo agrees with Marshall at 456 n. 215 in a discussion about arguments on behalf of an early date of Acts: "accuracy in detail does not mean historicity." See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/i-howard-marshall-new-testament-scholar-dies-at-81/> (accessed November 8, 2023) about Marshall's primary goals in his scholarship to "reconcile men to God" and to foster a "clear acceptance of the supreme authority of scripture."



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The primary concerns of the three Pastoral Epistles are “the life and rules governing individual Christian communities”¹⁷ and possible differences between Jewish and non-Jewish members of the Jesus communities.¹⁸ In the case of Acts, it “paints an idealized church expanding in an orderly, harmonious fashion, from Jerusalem to Rome and from Jew to Gentile. . . Acts replaces an ethnic distinction with a theological distinction that comes to define. . . the new people of God.”¹⁹

2 Timothy 4:10 indicates that Titus has gone to Dalmatia (modern Croatia), while other missionaries have gone elsewhere. While we do not know how historically accurate this narrative is, we will see below the significance of 2 Timothy 4:19-21 and 1:5 because, among the named male members of the Jesus movement, are the women Priscilla, Claudia, Lois and Eunice.

In addition, 1 Timothy 5:1-6:2 and Titus 2:2-10 are examples of so-called Household Codes that encourage the restriction of women’s roles in the early Jesus groups, a stance quite different from the women who interacted with Paul, as can be seen in Phil 4:2-3, 1 Cor 16:19, Phlm 2, and Rom 16 passim.²⁰ The Household Codes thus serve as additional evidence for concluding that Titus was not written by Paul.²¹

What can we learn about Titus the Jesus missionary from Titus the letter? Without knowing the epistle’s author, this is not easy to answer. We *can* conclude, from internal and external evidence, that “the Pastorals represent the views of late first- or early second-century Christians who appealed to Paul for their authority.”²² This period of time in the development of the Jesus movement was more concerned with conformity with the wider culture, so this “corrective mode” of the Pastorals presents “Paul as supporting the status quo” rather than the previous, more non-conformist stances such as erasing distinctions between slaves and freepersons and advocating celibacy.²³

The primary insights about the man Titus from the epistle to Titus are several:

- Titus had a reputation for being very loyal to the Jesus mission (1:4).
- The stated reason that Paul sent Titus to Crete was for Titus to “appoint elders [presbyteroi] in every town” (1:5).²⁴ These leaders are admonished to possess certain positive personal attributes.
- The Jesus movement on Crete was probably fairly new, although it is doubtful that it had come about solely due to Paul’s efforts.²⁵
- The reputation of the inhabitants of Crete – Cretans – was very negative: rebellious, “liars, vicious brutes, and lazy gluttons” (1:10, 12 NRSV). Here the author is quoting or referring to the sixth-century BCE poet Epimenides.²⁶

¹⁷ Naomi Koltun-Fromm, “The First Letter of Paul to Timothy,” in Levine and Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 383.

¹⁸ Jennifer L. Koosed, “The Letter of Paul to Titus,” in Levine and Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 397-98. There are theological and other reasons for the composition of these texts, which we cannot explore in depth here.

¹⁹ Gilbert, “Acts of the Apostles,” 198.

²⁰ MacDonald, “Reading,” 200-11.

²¹ See Sarah J. Tanzer, “Older and Younger Women Exhorted,” in Meyers, Craven and Kraemer, eds., *Women in Scripture*, 494-95.

²² Koltun-Fromm, “First Letter,” 383.

²³ Koltun-Fromm, “First Letter,” 383.

²⁴ This is the only canonical reference to a Pauline mission to Crete (Koosed, “Letter of Paul,” 398).

²⁵ See discussion in William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 46. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 385-87.

²⁶ Koosed, “Letter of Paul,” 399; see also <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Epimenides>, accessed March 2023.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The controversy around Titus and circumcision (Galatians 2:1ff) has some support from the ancient literary record. Evidence for Judaism on Crete dates from at least the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees, written in the late second century BCE,²⁷ suggesting that there was frequent commerce between the Jewish community, Crete, especially Gortyna, and Judea. 1 Maccabees 15:15-24 relates that Gortyna was apparently one of the recipients of a letter from the Roman consul Lucius to King Ptolemy. The letter requested "our friends and allies," the Jews, to renew their original alliance and support the high priest Simon, and Lucius demanded extradition for any "traitor" Jews who had taken refuge in the cities that received the letter.²⁸

As is the case with many saints and martyrs of the early church, tradition has added information that can often be inspiring but may not be historical in the modern sense of the word. Some Christian denominations that venerate Titus offer details about his early life, ministry, old age, death and even the disposition of his mortal remains.

According to Urho the Way, associated with the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, (Saint) Titus, from a polytheistic family from Crete, studied Hellenistic philosophy and did not engage in Graeco-Roman cultic activities. This hagiography claims that Titus, beginning to doubt what he had learned from his early studies, heard Jesus in person in Jerusalem, became a follower, and witnessed the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The narrative further asserts that Titus was baptized by Paul, later became his secretary and may have been his "interpreter." In Corinth, Titus was credited with important administrative capabilities to resolve the issues there. Before Paul left Crete after working on the island with Titus, Paul ostensibly ordained Titus and appointed him as bishop. Titus' main responsibilities then included ordaining other priests and bishops.²⁹ (It should be noted that, according to scholars, "Christians have never taken a purely formal, institutional view of Church offices."³⁰ An ordination ceremony in the earliest communities is purportedly found in Acts 14:23, which uses wording similar to that in Titus 1:5-6, but the implication of both passages is that the movement of the Spirit takes precedence over the ceremonial laying-on of hands. There is little direct transition from the charismatic aspects of the Jesus mission to the institutional.)³¹

According to some sources, Titus led the "Church of Crete well into his 90s, overturning paganism and promoting the faith through his prayers and preaching." He died peacefully in old age.³² The lore also reports on Titus' mortal remains. They were entombed in the cathedral of Gortyna, and his relics were moved to Venice during the Turkish occupation. Now, however, only his skull remains; since 1966, it has been kept in veneration in the Church of St. Titus at Heraklion.³³ Titus' feast day in the Syrian Orthodox Church is August 25.³⁴ In the Episcopal Church³⁵ and the Roman Catholic Church,

²⁷ William H. Brownlee, "Maccabees, Books of" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Buttrick, Vol. 3, 205.

²⁸ Clyde E. Fant and Mitchell G. Reddish, *A Guide to Biblical Sites in Greece and Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 78-79.

²⁹ Urho, The Way, "St. Titus," August 2020, <https://urhotheway.com/2020/08/25/st-titus/> (accessed March 2023). This assertion may originate with the church historian Eusebius, *History of the Church* 3.4, "We may for instance Timothy, stated to have been the first bishop appointed to the see of Ephesus, as was Titus to the churches of Crete" (G.A. Williamson, tr., *Eusebius: The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House], 109). Note that Ti 1:5 does not support the assertion that Paul ordained Titus as Bishop of Crete (Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 387).

³⁰ Pervo, *Dating Acts*, 214.

³¹ Pervo, *Dating Acts*, 214-15.

³² <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/saint/sts-timothy-and-titus-128>, accessed March 2023.

³³ Urho, The Way, "St. Titus," August 2020, <https://urhotheway.com/2020/08/25/st-titus/> (accessed March 2023).

³⁴ Urho, The Way, "St. Titus;" see also James Moffatt, "Titus, Saint," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 22 (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1963), 260.

³⁵ <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/titus/>, accessed March 2023.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Titus and Timothy are celebrated together on January 26.³⁶ While we know little about Titus from actual historical sources, his life and works are held in high regard by many Christians today.

GODDESS HERITAGE ON CRETE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND OTHER EVIDENCE

Our interest in Crete originates with the ministry of Titus there as mentioned in the NT texts. The passages that specifically mention Crete and Cretans are Acts 27:7, 8, 12, 13, and 21 and Titus 1:5, 12. As we have noted, both Acts and Titus contain elements that do not reflect historical reality, but they do demonstrate ancient writers' interest in the island and its inhabitants. We have treated the Titus passages above. Those in Acts 27 are basically passing references in Luke's story of the early Jesus movement.

Here we will turn our attention to a broader picture of Crete, starting with an overview of prehistoric Crete and its goddess-oriented legacy. We will also note references to Crete from literature and mythology that would have been familiar to those who lived in the first few centuries CE; and we will examine archaeological evidence from the Roman Imperial era. As we shall see, the legacy of female deities and women's involvement, even leadership, in Graeco-Roman cults is ancient, persistent and significant for the history of the Jesus movement and early Christianity.

Crete is well-known in modern times for its association with the so-called Minoan civilization of the Bronze Age, the work of famed archaeologist Sir Arthur John Evans (1851-1941),³⁷ the temple complexes of Knossos, Phaistos and Mallia, and the island's striking sculpture, frescoes, pottery, jewelry, and metalwork. While the association between Crete and King Minos is spurious – invented primarily by Evans – the archeological record from the Neolithic and Bronze Ages points clearly toward the prominence of both women and goddesses in art of the so-called Neopalatial period on Crete,³⁸ which suggests that women may well have dominated the society, perhaps even politically.³⁹

While it is somewhat difficult to reconstruct Minoan religion from the available evidence and without documentary sources,⁴⁰ some scholars have been able to draw compelling theories from what *is* available. Nanno Marinatos, for instance, writing at approximately the same time as the late archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, who worked extensively with Cretan evidence, explores goddesses and gods on Crete at some length. Examining a large selection of finds, Marinatos cites evidence for a goddess or goddesses linked to vegetation, animals, trees, mountains, birds, snakes, lions, monkeys, and even imaginary griffins. She declares, "The iconography of the female Minoan deity points unambiguously to a concept of primary importance: a nurturing goddess of nature."⁴¹

³⁶ <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/saint/sts-timothy-and-titus-128>, accessed March 2023. See also "Titus, St.," in F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), 1381-82.

³⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arthur-Evans>, accessed March 2023.

³⁸ Scholars date this period with slight variations: 1650-1450 BCE, as per Marinatos, *Minoan Religion*, 4, or 1750-1460 BCE as per Stuart W. Manning, "Chronology and Terminology," in Eric H. Cline, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Bronze Age Aegean (ca. 3000-1000 BC)* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14, 23. See also Jeremy B. Rutter of Dartmouth College, <https://sites.dartmouth.edu/aegean-prehistory/lessons/lesson-18-narrative/>, who uses the approximate dates of 1750/1720-1490/1470 BCE (accessed October 2023).

³⁹ John G. Younger and Paul Rehak, "Minoan Culture: Religion, Burial Customs, and Administration," in Cynthia W. Shelmerdine, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Aegean Bronze Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 182.

⁴⁰ Younger and Rehak, "Minoan Culture," 165, 167.

⁴¹ Marinatos, *Minoan Religion*, 147-66.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Marinatos also cites evidence for male gods, although these examples are far fewer than those for goddesses. Marinatos states that the role of female deities in this culture was to feed or tend animals, and the role of the male god was to control the beasts and nature as a whole.⁴²

Gimbutas came to similar – perhaps even more evocative – conclusions in the 1980s. Postulating a vibrant, peaceful civilization that was focused on an all-powerful nature goddess,⁴³ Gimbutas further described this culture as based on a matrilineal structure through which the goddess and her council guided the life of a community through “the role of an honored elder, the great clan mother, who was assisted by a council of women.” The queen-priestess presided over agriculture and religious life, while the male figure – a priest or consort figure – had control over craft organization, trade and other aspects of communal life. Significantly, neither the female nor male figures had dominating control; “they seem to have functioned as collective entities, not as autocracies.”⁴⁴ Evidence from clay figurines depicting various aspects of the goddess – the snake, the nourishing mother, and pregnant – has been found on Crete and dates from 5800 to 1600 BCE,⁴⁵ demonstrating the longevity of this civilization.

The ancient goddess, on Crete and throughout Old Europe,⁴⁶ was the ancestor to many of the goddesses with which we are familiar from later eras – and this is where we start to see the connection between prehistoric evidence and the environment in which the early Jesus missionaries would have worked. The Linear B tablets, discovered in the early 20th century on Crete and in Mycenaean sites on mainland Greece and translated in 1952, provide clear evidence for the survival of the ancient goddess into the Graeco-Roman era. Along with fairly mundane short lists and inventories, the tablets also contain names of deities that were worshiped in Minoan times and survived much longer: the goddesses Eileithyia, associated with Artemis Eileithyia, who protects women in childbirth; Hera; and Athena; along with male deities such as Zeus, Poseidon, Dionysos, Ares and possibly Apollo.⁴⁷ On Crete specifically, two caves still carry the ancient names of Artemis Eileithyia and Dikte (possibly related to the Greek word dikyon, “net,” and another name for the ancient Minoan goddess of regeneration, Diktynna); caves have long been associated with rituals to the prehistoric goddess.⁴⁸

There is a further connection between the temple complex at Knossos and the major goddess that was worshiped there. One of the Mycenaean Linear B tablets contains a reference to a honey offering dedicated to “Our Lady (or Queen) of the Labyrinth,” the goddess whose symbol was the labrys, or double ax,⁴⁹ from which the word labyrinth comes. Also found in one of the Knossos tablets is a dedication to a variation of the name of Athena in her death aspect – which is, in effect, also her aspect of regeneration.⁵⁰

In addition to the survival of ancient deities into the historical period, as partially attested through their names, people in the Roman Imperial era would have known about Crete and its heritage through mythology. In Greek mythology,

⁴² Marinatos, *Minoan Religion*, 166-74.

⁴³ Gimbutas, *Civilization*, 342-46. Significantly, neither Younger and Rehak nor Lupack dialogue with Gimbutas’ material on Crete.

⁴⁴ Gimbutas, *Civilization*, 344. See also Elise Boulding, *The Underside of History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1976; rev. ed., Sage Publications, 1992), 216: “There is little evidence of a formal priesthood in this society, although dance leaders may have been priestesses.”

⁴⁵ See Carol P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), Figures 5, 10 and 11. Further examples can be found in Gimbutas, *Civilization*, 22, 234, 237, 240, and 247.

⁴⁶ Gimbutas has coined the term Old Europe to refer to Neolithic Europe before the Indo-Europeans, approximately the seventh to the third millennia BCE (*Civilization*, vii).

⁴⁷ Gimbutas, *Living Goddesses*, 133, 139, 149, 151.

⁴⁸ Gimbutas, *Living Goddesses*, 139, 142; Lupack, “Minoan Religion,” 253-54.

⁴⁹ Gimbutas, *Living Goddesses*, 143.

⁵⁰ Gimbutas, *Living Goddesses*, 144.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

stories about Zeus, Europa, Minos, the Minotaur, and Daedalus, as well as songs, tales, ballads and other popular lore concerning Crete, would have been transmitted orally for generations until written down. Many of these remnants would have centered around female deities, demonstrating that Cretans “remained faithful to the Great Mother Goddess in all her manifestations”⁵¹ for millennia.

In addition to mythology, Paul, Titus and other early Jesus followers would have been familiar with traditional writings in which Crete was featured, including the works of Greek historians Thucydides, Diodorus Siculus, and Strabo, famed philosopher Aristotle, and artist Apollodorus, as well as renowned Roman Pliny the Elder and the Egyptian astronomer, mathematician and geographer Ptolemy.⁵² Crete – an influential island at the crossroads of commerce and a home to many diverse peoples for centuries – reached its peak around 500 BCE, and its history was marked for several centuries by alliances with various Mediterranean powers, but these references indicate that it was still honored as Roman rule commenced in the first century BCE.⁵³

Archaeological evidence can easily be neglected in treatments of NT texts and stories of venerated saints, but Roman-era remains of buildings, artifacts and finds related to the Graeco-Roman cults on Crete are vital to better illustrating the context in which the early Jesus followers lived, worked and worshiped. The remains are not numerous due to modern construction, but those that do exist support in material form the persistence of deities, especially goddesses, whose names, mythology and literary references we have just noted. When Christian tradition asserts that Titus was instrumental in “overturning paganism” on Crete,⁵⁴ the evidence compels us to question that claim and its validity.

The major site that has yielded Roman-era finds is the city of Gortyna, mentioned above in conjunction with Judaism on the island. In addition, villas, mosaics, temples, sculptures, aqueducts, roads and brickwork from the Roman and early Byzantine eras can be found throughout the island.⁵⁵ (The harbor of Kalo Limenes/Fair Havens is mentioned in Acts 27:8 but is a modern tourist attraction that has yielded no archaeological finds of note.)

Gortyna (Gortyne) is Crete’s largest archaeological site and was “the political center and chief city” in Imperial times. Its population in the second century CE may have been as high as 100,000 inhabitants. The site has yielded remains of the Hellenistic-Roman odeon, the amphitheater, large Roman baths, smaller baths, the praetorium and the Temple of Apollo. The existence of the sixth-century CE Basilica of St. Titus suggests the city’s probable focal point of Titus’ ministry.⁵⁶

The Great Inscription, which is written on the north wall of the odeon, is a world-renowned law code from around 500 BCE that included rules concerning trade, family law, and personal rights. Because many Greek cities “based much of their own law systems” on the code, and because the odeon was built in the first century CE,⁵⁷ early Jesus missionaries would no doubt have known about it.

The Temple of Apollo, which should more precisely be called the Temple of Pythian Apollo,⁵⁸ due to the discovery of a colossal statue of Apollo Pythios in its ruins, was highly significant well into the Byzantine era, having originally been built in the seventh century BCE and restored and enlarged during the Hellenistic period. Further changes were made during the Roman period, and many inscriptions with administrative and law content have been found dating as late as

⁵¹ Bowman, *Guide to Crete*, 82-83.

⁵² Bowman, *Guide to Crete*, 88.

⁵³ Bowman, *Guide to Crete*, 71-77.

⁵⁴ <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/saint/sts-timothy-and-titus-128>, accessed March 2023.

⁵⁵ Bowman, *Guide to Crete*, 77.

⁵⁶ Fant and Reddish, *Guide to Biblical Sites*, 78. See also Bowman, *Guide to Crete*, 118.

⁵⁷ Fant and Reddish, *Guide to Biblical Sites*, 79.

⁵⁸ Bowman, *Guide to Crete*, 118.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

the second century CE. From this evidence, we know that the Apollo cult was still active during and after the time of the early Jesus movement.

The most famous Apollo sanctuary in antiquity was at Delphi on the Greek mainland. It would have been widely known throughout antiquity that the primary religious figure there was the Pythia, a female oracle or priestess who was frequently consulted for advice on wars and political situations. This influential woman who served in the position at any given time – “over 50 who lived apart from her husband and dressed in a maiden’s clothes” – first belonged to Mother Earth/Gaia.⁵⁹ Even though the myth of Apollo later indicated that he had overcome (perhaps even killed) the Pythia,⁶⁰ the impressive natural setting of the sanctuary at Delphi reflected “the might of the natural world and of its goddess” for centuries. It is likely that Greeks throughout the ages believed that the Olympian gods such as Apollo would never fully conquer centuries-old female-oriented power.⁶¹

The prophetic gifts of the priestesses who served as the Pythia eventually subsided, especially after the capture of Delphi by Rome in the early second century BCE. Since the prophecy of the priestess who served last was said to have been delivered around 393 CE during the reign of Emperor Theodosius I, her reputation and close connection with Apollo would have endured into the Christian era.⁶² Thus the long association between a significant female religious figure in the Apollo cult – not only at Delphi but also at Gortyna and elsewhere – would have been familiar to Paul, Titus, and other early Jesus followers. What may be further confirmation of this connection is the existence of an oracle of Apollo near Samaria, Crete. The nearby Gorge had much to do with the connection between nature and the female side of life; visitors to this, the largest true gorge in Europe forged by thousands of years of downpours, have described with awe their visit “like some descent into the underworld or back into some past” age.⁶³

Most significant at Gortyna for our purposes are the second-century CE ruins of the Sanctuary of the Egyptian Gods – Isis and Serapis.⁶⁴ The Egyptian goddess Isis was a relatively new deity in the Empire, often worshiped along with her husband/brother Osiris/Serapis and their son Horus/Harpocrates. Isis became popular throughout the Empire after her introduction in the Hellenistic era, in large part because her cult addressed the personal needs of her devotees, such as personal safety and security, other challenges of everyday life, and what happens after death.⁶⁵ Further, Isis was a healing deity linked to women and children,⁶⁶ making her quite attractive to many Cretans whom the Jesus missionaries, even long after the time of Paul and Titus, would have encountered.

The activity in these religious buildings of the Imperial era and for several centuries thereafter would have included the leadership of women. The high level of female involvement and leadership in ancient cults, especially among women of elite families, has become widely documented over the past several decades. Women were primary to the centers of power and influence; their involvement in public and private rites throughout the Mediterranean region is reflected in the large number of festivals on cities’ calendars and the festivals’ significance for the entire citizen body. Because many

⁵⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Delphic-oracle>, accessed May 2023.

⁶⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Apollo-Greek-mythology>, accessed May 2023.

⁶¹ Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods*, revised ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979; first printed 1962), 108.

⁶² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Delphic-oracle>, accessed May 2023.

⁶³ Bowman, *Guide to Crete*, 179-80.

⁶⁴ Fant and Reddish, *Guide to Biblical Sites*, 79, and Bowman, *Guide to Crete*, 118.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth A. McCabe, *An Examination of the Isis Cult with Preliminary Exploration into New Testament Studies* (Lanham/Boulder/New York: University Press of America, 2008), 55-56.

⁶⁶ Lilian Portefaix, *Sisters Rejoice* (Uppsala: Coniectanea Biblica; New Testament Series 20, 1988), 81-82, 117-19.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

offices available to women were highly prestigious, especially in Greece,⁶⁷ the prevalence of female leaders on Crete and elsewhere must be fully acknowledged when discussing the context in which Paul, Titus and other male Jesus missionaries operated.⁶⁸

The persistence of the worship of Graeco-Roman deities into the first several centuries CE does not automatically signal conflict between polytheists and early Christians, nor does it mean that devotees of other deities were immediately attracted to the missionaries' message. Rather, it encourages us to better understand the nuances of "conversion" to the Jesus message, why some polytheists may have retained their involvement with traditional cults while others may have been attracted to the Jesus movement, and how the role of women may have influenced their decisions.

TITUS AND WOMEN LEADERS IN THE EARLY IMPERIAL ERA

Toward the end of 2 Timothy (4:19, 21), two women in the Jesus movement are mentioned: Priscilla (always mentioned in the NT with her husband, Aquila) and Claudia. Two other women, Lois and Eunice, mentioned in 2 Timothy 1:5, are noted by name or relationship along with male missionaries in the Pastorals (1 Tm 1:20, 2 Tm 1:16, 4:10-14, and 19-21, and Ti 3:12-13). Even though 1 Timothy 2:8-15 contains this restrictive admonition – "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent" (NRSV) – the women mentioned in these post-Pauline letters point in the direction of female involvement, if not also leadership, in the early Jesus movement, along with men.

Priscilla is one of the best-known female figures in the Pauline corpus and the early Jesus group story. She and her husband Aquila, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:19, 2 Timothy 4:19 and Acts 18, were probably a missionary pair and worked as tentmakers. Forced to leave Rome because of Emperor Claudius' edict expelling all Jews (49 CE), they moved back to Rome after 54 CE when the edict was lifted. Although Paul wrote to them at Rome, they had already been active as missionaries in the Jesus movement before Paul met them in Corinth. Their roles would have included preaching, teaching, and presiding.⁶⁹

At Rome, Priscilla and Aquila hosted gatherings of Jesus followers in their house that would have included slaves, freedmen, freedwomen, workers and others, with the leader almost certainly being Priscilla, since she is listed first several times in the texts. The couple was probably relatively well off and may have been patrons or benefactors of Paul. In short, Priscilla was "a very important, well-traveled missionary and church leader whose work on occasion intersected with that of Paul."⁷⁰ Thus, while there is no direct connection between Priscilla and Titus, her appearance in one of the Pastoral Letters provides evidence for women's leadership in the early Jesus movement that parallels what we know from the authentic Pauline letters, archaeology and other sources.

The figure of Claudia is included in a short list of other Jesus missionaries – Eubulus, Pudens, and Linus – who send greetings to the recipients of 2 Timothy. The fourth-century document, "Apostolic Constitutions," identifies "Linus as Peter's successor in Rome and Claudia as his mother."⁷¹ It is also possible that Claudia is an invention of or someone

⁶⁷ Valerie Abrahamsen, "Priestesses and Other Female Cult Leaders at Philippi in the Early Christian Era," in *The People beside Paul: The Philippian Assembly and History from Below*, ed. Joseph A. Marchal (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 37-39. See also Joan Breton Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 3-10.

⁶⁸ "The appearance of women in leadership roles should not be seen as unique in ancient society. Rather, early Christian women acted in ways that were in keeping with the leadership of women in other communities in the Roman imperial world" (MacDonald, "Reading," 218).

⁶⁹ Julette M. Bassler, "Prisca/Priscilla," in Meyers, Craven and Kraemer, eds., *Women in Scripture*, 136-37.

⁷⁰ Bassler, "Prisca/Priscilla," 136-37.

⁷¹ Tal Ilan, "The Second Letter of Paul to Timothy," in Levine and Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 396.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

known to the author of the letter, an unattested member of Paul's circle, or a compilation of several female missionaries. In 2 Timothy, Claudia is associated in some way with the Pauline mission, although it is not known whether she traveled for the mission, may have owned or lived in a home that hosted other missionaries, and/or who may have provided monetary support. Even if Claudia is fictitious, her mention in 2 Timothy – a letter by an author who otherwise promotes the silencing of women in the Jesus groups (1 Tm 2:9-14) – does suggest a parallel with the significant involvement of women in authentic Pauline communities, as noted above. On the other hand, the absence of any specific roles mentioned for her in the mission may suggest that the author wished to avoid explicitly representing women as the leaders and patrons, as they were in the authentic Pauline epistles⁷² (although specific roles are not mentioned for the men either).

Lois and Eunice appear to be familiarly related to Timothy, according to 2 Timothy 1:5: Eunice as his mother and Lois as his grandmother. It is impossible to know whether these women were real or fictitious, since the letter was written and circulated one or two generations after the time of Timothy and Paul. We also cannot know for sure about their backgrounds. Acts 16:1-3, which might also be fictitious, implies that Eunice was Jewish and his father a polytheist, while 2 Timothy 3:15 mentions "sacred writings," which could be Jewish or Christian. It was not unusual in ancient Jewish and Christian writings to assign names to unnamed but venerated figures, so the names Eunice and Lois may have been added to Timothy's biography for the sake of the narrative.⁷³

Furthermore, because these women, who possessed "sincere faith," is contrasted with "little" or "silly women, overwhelmed by their sins and swayed by all kinds of desires" (2 Tm 3:6 NRSV), the emphasis on their characterization as devout mothers would fit more comfortably with the author's preference that women perform traditional as opposed to leadership roles: the other letter by the same author forbids women to teach or have authority over men (1 Tm 2:9-14).⁷⁴

The mention of Priscilla, Claudia, Lois and Eunice in "sister" letters of Titus strongly suggests that Titus too would have encountered, known and worked with female missionaries, women leaders, and women who helped train his male co-workers from youth. What we are witnessing, of course, is the beginning even at this early stage in the movement of the attempt to restrict women's roles in some circles – from Priscilla and Claudia as leaders to Lois and Eunice in maternal roles.

What these examples lead us to consider is the general context of women in the Graeco-Roman cults on Crete during the early Imperial era; even if the restriction of women's roles in the early Jesus groups is reflected in the Pastoral Letters to some extent, and even if that trend were ultimately victorious in what became the mainline church, women did continue to be involved and exercise authority in early Christianity and polytheism for centuries. As Ramsey MacMullen asserted in a 1996 article, paganism was extremely hard to kill.⁷⁵

CONCLUSIONS

Christian tradition has promoted the powerful, dominant narrative in the West that the movement begun by Jesus, Paul, Titus and others was the "true religion" and victorious within the first few decades over Graeco-Roman deities and their cults. Examining reliable archaeological evidence from the earliest years of what ultimately became Christianity, in

⁷² Kraemer (2000a), "Claudia," in Meyers, Craven and Kraemer, eds., *Women in Scripture*, 63.

⁷³ Kraemer (2000b), "Eunice," in Meyers, Craven and Kraemer, eds., *Women in Scripture*, 78; and Kraemer (2000c), "Lois," in Meyers, Craven and Kraemer, eds., *Women in Scripture*, 109-10.

⁷⁴ Kraemer (2000b), "Eunice," 78, and (2000c), "Lois," 110.

⁷⁵ Ramsay MacMullen, "Paganism – Hard to Kill," *Journal of Higher Criticism*, Vol. 3., No. 1 (Spring 1996) 3-17.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

conjunction with texts, literature and mythology, provides us with facts that enable us to question traditional assumptions. Cults to gods and goddesses survived for millennia for a reason: they met everyday people's needs. Neither these cults nor their adherents were necessarily immoral, corrupt, or evil, as promulgated by many Christian apologists. Trade and travel allowed new belief systems, practices and rituals to enter a community and take root; people added deities to their religious repertoire when the newcomers were attractive. The polytheism of the ancient world, originating in prehistoric times when a powerful nature goddess ruled, enabled dozens of cults in any given city or colony to coexist in harmony.

Women and goddesses were an integral and essential part of the ancient environment, and that fact leads to several reasonable conclusions. First, female objects of devotion were common in the Roman Imperial era and highly respected in many circles. Second, polytheistic women would probably not have been attracted to the Jesus movement if they had been excluded from its leadership roles. Third, male and female worshippers of the traditional deities would not have automatically been drawn to the religion of Paul, Titus and others unless their various needs were met by the new cult. Finally, any conflicts between groups may well have been relatively muted.

The example of the ministry of Titus on Crete opens many windows into early Christian origins. A deeper knowledge of the people and deities encountered by Titus, his fellow Jesus followers, and their successors helps us not only to better understand why the ancient traditions were so resilient in the face of unrelenting opposition, and even violence, but also to correct the record.

WORKS CITED

- Abrahamsen, V. A. (2015). Priestesses and Other Female Cult Leaders at Philippi in the Early Christian Era. In J. A. Marchal (Ed.), *The People beside Paul: The Philippian Assembly and History from Below*, (pp. 25-62). Atlanta, GA: SBL Press.
- Avery-Peck, A. J. (2011). The Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians. In A-J. Levine and M. Z. Brettler (Eds.), *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, (pp. 315-31). New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Beker, J.C. (1962). Pastoral letters, The. In G. A. Buttrick (Ed.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, (pp. 668-75). Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press.
- Boulding, E. (1992). *The Underside of History*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1976; rev. ed., Sage Publications.
- Bowman, J. (1962). *A Guide to Crete*. London: Pantheon Books.
- Brownlee, W. H. (1962). Maccabees, Books of. In G. A. Buttrick (Ed.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, (3), 201-15. Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press.
- Buttrick, G. A. (Ed.) (1962). *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press.
- Christ, C. P. (1997). *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality*. Reading, MA, etc.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.
- Cline, E. H. (Ed.) (2010). *The Oxford Handbook of the Bronze Age Aegean (ca. 3000-1000 BC)*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, S. J. D. (2011). The Letter of Paul to the Galatians. In A-J. Levine and M. Z. Brettler (Eds.), *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, (pp. 332-44). New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Connelly, J. B. (2007). *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

- Cross, F.L. and Livingstone, E.A. (Eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crossan, J. D. and J. L. Reed. (2004). *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom*. New York: Harper San Francisco.
- Fant, C. E. and M. G. Reddish. (2003). *A Guide to Biblical Sites in Greece and Turkey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gilbert, G. (2011). Acts of the Apostles. In A-J. Levine and M. Z. Brettler (Eds.), *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, (pp. 197-252). New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Gimbutas, M. (1991). *The Civilization of the Goddess*, J. Marler (Ed.), San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.
- Gimbutas, M. (1996). *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe 6500-3500 BC: Myths and Cult Images*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. First ed.: London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1974, 1982. Originally published in the U.S. in 1974 by University of California Press under the title *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 7000-3500 BC*. New and updated edition in paperback, 1982.
- Gimbutas, M. (2001). *The Living Goddesses*, edited and supplemented by M. Robbins Dexter. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Ilan, T. (2011). The Second Letter of Paul to Timothy. In A-J. Levine and M. Z. Brettler (Eds.), *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, (pp. 391-96). New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Karris, R. J., OFM. (1993). Pastoral letters, The. In B. M. Metzger and M. D. Coogan (Eds.), *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, (pp. 573-76). New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Koltun-Fromm, N. (2011). The First Letter of Paul to Timothy. In A-J. Levine and M. Z. Brettler (Eds.), *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, (pp. 383-90). New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Koosed, J. L. (2011). The Letter of Paul to Titus. In A-J. Levine and M. Z. Brettler (Eds.), *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, (pp. 397-401). New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Kraemer, R. S. (2000a). Claudia. In C. Meyers, T. Craven and R. S. Kraemer (Eds.), *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, (pp. 62-63). Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Kraemer, R. S. (2000b). Eunice. In C. Meyers, T. Craven and R. S. Kraemer (Eds.), *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, (pp. 78-79). Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Kraemer, R. S. (2000c). Lois. In C. Meyers, T. Craven and R. S. Kraemer (Eds.), *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, (pp. 109-10). Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Levine, A-J. and M. Z. Brettler (Eds.) (2011). *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Lupack, S. (2010). Minoan Religion. In E. H. Cline (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Bronze Age Aegean (ca. 3000-1000 BC)*, (pp. 251-76). Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- MacDonald, M. Y. (1999). Reading Real Women Through the Undisputed Letters of Paul. In R. S. Kraemer and M. R. D'Angelo (Eds.), *Women and Christian Origins*, (199-220). New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MacMullen, R. (Spring 1996). Paganism – Hard to Kill. *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 3 (1), 3-17.
- Manning, S. W. (2010). Chronology and Terminology. In E. H. Cline (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Bronze Age Aegean (ca. 3000-1000 BC)*, (pp. 11-28). Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Marinatos, N. (1993). *Minoan Religion: Ritual, Image, and Symbol*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- McCabe, E. A. (2008). *An Examination of the Isis Cult with Preliminary Exploration into New Testament Studies*. Lanham/Boulder/New York: University Press of America.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

- Meyers, C., T. Craven and R. S. Kraemer (Eds.) (2000). *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Moffatt, J. (1963). Titus, Saint. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (22), 260. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.
- Mounce, W. D. (2000). *Pastoral Epistles*. Word Biblical Commentary, (46). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- Pervo, R. I. (2006). *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists*. Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press.
- Portefaix, L. (1988). *Sisters Rejoice*. Uppsala: Coniectanea Biblica; New Testament Series 20.
- Scully, V. (1979). *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods*, revised ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press; first printed 1962.
- Shelmerdine, C. W. (Ed.) (2008). *The Cambridge Companion to the Aegean Bronze Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tanzer, S. J. (2000). Older and Younger Women Exhorted. In C. Meyers, T. Craven and R. S. Kraemer (Eds.), *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, (pp. 494-95). Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Titus, St. (1985). F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (Eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press), 1381-82.
- White, L. M. (2004). *From Jesus to Christianity*. New York: Harper San Francisco.
- Williamson, G.A., tr. (1965). *Eusebius: The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House.
- Younger, J. G. and P. Rehak. (2008). Minoan Culture: Religion, Burial Customs, and Administration. In C. W. Shelmerdine (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Aegean Bronze Age*, (pp. 165-85). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

THE ELIZABETH EISENSTEIN ESSAY PRIZE 2022

The Elizabeth Eisenstein Prize is open to all NCIS members and recognizes excellence in independent scholarship. The Prize is awarded annually for the best peer-reviewed published article submitted by a member of NCIS, and brings the winner an honorarium, which this year is \$350. The article must have been published in a peer reviewed journal or edited academic book within the last two years, and all authors must be members of NCIS, whether the authorship is single or multiple. Details at <https://www.ncis.org/grants>

The Eisenstein Prize was established in April 1993 and is named for Elizabeth Lewisohn Eisenstein (1923–2016), Professor of History at American University (1959–1979) and the University of Michigan (1975–1985), and mother of Margaret DeLacy, one of NCIS’s founders, in recognition of Professor Eisenstein’s long-standing support of NCIS. After 2012 the Prize lapsed due to lack of funding, but was revived following Professor Eisenstein’s passing in January 2016.

The best essays in 2022 were the following:

WINNER:

Gianncarlo Muschi (2021). “U.S.-Peruvian Business Relations and Their Effects on the Pioneer Migration of Peruvians to Paterson, New Jersey 1920–1950.” First published in *The Latin Americanist*, Volume 65, Number 2, June 2021, pp. 286-311. doi:10.1353/tla.2021.0019.

RUNNER-UP:

Vanessa Mongey (2021). “Protecting Foreigners: The Refugee Crisis on the Belize–Yucatán Border, 1847–71.” First published in *Law and History Review*, February 2021, Vol. 39, No. 1.

While we are disappointed not to be able to reprint the winning essay due to copyright restrictions we are delighted to be able to reprint the runner-up essay, with grateful thanks to the author and publisher.



Protecting Foreigners: The Refugee Crisis on the Belize–Yucatán Border, 1847–71.

Vanessa Mongey, Ph.D.

First published in *Law and History Review*, February 2021, Vol. 39, No. 1.

Reprinted with the kind permission of the author and publisher.

Abstract

Taking mid-nineteenth century Belize as a case study, this article considers the role of migration in forming political, legal, and spatial geographies in a region with weak state institutions and disputed borders. The Caste War—a series of conflicts starting in 1847 in the southeastern Mexican state of Yucatán—resulted in the movement of thousands of people into the neighboring British settlement of Belize. This population movement reshaped the interface between the metropole and the settlement. This was a colony-defining moment in the development of Belize, leading to an extension of imperial control that eventually culminated in the transition to Crown colony in 1871. The refugee crisis was tied to broader Atlantic questions around asylum, law and empire. The benevolent treatment of refugees became the gauge of a “civilized” colony until the refugee crisis turned into a race crisis. This article examines how local administrators used a humanitarian discourse to enshrine white settler colonialism in a territory suddenly inhabited by a foreign-born multi-ethnic majority. The refugee label became a way to secure British sovereignty over the territory and its inhabitants, including non-British subjects, while extracting resources from the newcomers.

Keywords: borderlands; British empire; Caste War; international law; refuge; sovereignty

When troubles erupted in Yucatán in July 1847 between Maya groups and the Mexican state, thousands of individuals crossed the Hondo River, which served as the boundary between Mexico and Belize.¹ The U.S. consul estimated that 7000 people crossed the river in the first year of the conflict.² They escaped what became known as the Caste War, a

¹ Until the name of the colony changed from British Honduras to Belize in 1973, Belize referred to the town of Belize on the Caribbean coast. In this article, the name Belize refers to the territory of British Honduras and present-day Belize. On the Caste War, see Terry Rugeley, *Rebellion Now and Forever: Mayas, Hispanics, and Caste War Violence in Yucatán, 1800-1880* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) and Don E. Dumond, *The Machete and the Cross: Campesino Rebellion in Yucatán* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997). For a summary of the historiography, see Michele McArdle Stephens, "Caste Wars in Yucatán," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History* (2017) DOI:10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.386.

² Christopher Hempstead to James Buchanan, May 26, 1848, Despatches from U.S. consuls in Belize, 1847-1906, Records of the Department of State, National Archives and Records Service, Washington D.C. (hereafter NARA), National Archives Microfilm



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

decades-long struggle that would devastate the region until 1901. This population movement dramatically altered the demographics of a territory that went from 10,000 inhabitants in 1840 to over 25,000 in 1861. Of these 25,000, 57% were not born in Belize; and 85 % of these foreign-born inhabitants came from the neighboring republics of Mexico and Guatemala.³ In the two decades after the beginning of the war, local officials anxiously experimented with sometimes contradictory policies to govern a population of foreigners. They regarded these multiethnic and alien newcomers with a mix of suspicion, fear, and sympathy.

At the time of the outbreak of the Caste War, Belize had an ambiguous status within the British Empire. It was a settlement that was, as the Murders Abroad Act of 1817 phrased it, “in the possession and under the Protection” of the Crown but not formally annexed to the empire as a territory or a colony.⁴ On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the British government regarded Belize as a wilderness outpost of little interest to the empire. Belize was also a European settlement surrounded by independent Latin American republics. To add to this ambiguous status, its borders had long been contested between the British settlers and Spain, followed by the newly constituted republics of Mexico and Guatemala.

Far from being peripheral or anomalous, however, mid-nineteenth century Belize suggests new ways of thinking about imperial expansion, emphasizing the role of local actors and cross-border migrations. Responses to migration movements could produce political, legal, and spatial geographies, while furthering imperial economic and material interests.⁵ This “refugee crisis” became an opportunity to assert colonial control and reshape the interface between the metropole and the settlement. What happened in Belize between the start of the war in 1847 and the transition to colonial status in 1862 and then to Crown colony in 1871 was part of a broader discussion around the notion of refugees in the mid-nineteenth century British Atlantic world. At the time of the Caste War, ideas about protection and asylum were undergoing a transformation in the metropole. Although no set of agreed principles existed, Britain’s liberal ideology framed refugees as particularly worthy of sympathy and protection in a way that other foreigners or migrants were not.

The “refugee” category, first applied to French Huguenots fleeing Catholic absolutism in the late seventeenth century, now encompassed those who fled wars and revolutions on the continent. Whether it was a deliberate enthusiasm for refugee humanitarianism, as Caroline Shaw argues, or an unintended by-product of liberal precepts as Bernard Porter believes, Britain had adopted an open-door policy.⁶ At the same time, an expansionist liberal ideology endowed British state representatives abroad with the responsibility to “protect” those considered less fortunate—Africans liberated from the slave trade or indigenous people. Unlike Europeans in Britain, these groups were rarely classified as refugees but rather as passive victims.⁷ This discourse carried global legal significance: it positioned English law as the defense against disorder and arbitrariness and was often used to justify territorial expansion.

Publication T334, roll 1.

³ O. Nigel Bolland, *The Formation of a Colonial Society: Belize, from Conquest to Crown Colony* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 4.

⁴ Acts of Parliament, 57 Geo. III, chap. 53, 1817.

⁵ M. Bianet Castellanos, “Introduction: Settler Colonialism in Latin America,” *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2017): 777–81.

⁶ Bernard Porter, *The Refugee Question in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Caroline Shaw, *Britannia’s Embrace. Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁷ C.R. Pennel, “The origins of the Foreign Jurisdiction Act and the extension of British sovereignty,” *Historical Research* 83, no. 221 (2010): 465–85; Josiah Kaplan and Brownen Everill, ed, *The History and Practice of Humanitarian Intervention and Aid in Africa* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Jenny S. Martinez, *The Slave Trade and the Origins of International Human Rights Law* (Oxford



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The open-door policy and the responsibility to protect were put to the test in the 1850s. Near the same time that thousands of Yucatecans began to settle in Belize, there were refugee crises in other parts of the empire. The British authorities turned away Italian republicans from Malta in the Mediterranean and French refugees from Jersey in the Channel Islands. These crises prompted refugees and their supporters in England to push for a more universal right of protection than before.⁸ The response to the refugee crisis in Belize provides valuable insight into how metropolitan ideas around protection and asylum were interpreted and implemented abroad.

However, Belize was an unusual case within the broader imperial order. To begin with, in other refugee crises in the 1850s, Belize let thousands settle in its territory. The decision might have been practical, because the local administration was too weak to police imprecise borders, but it eventually became a defining moment that proved central to the transition from settlement to colony. Even though the administration was anxious about incorporating a multi-ethnic population, they embedded this humanitarian discourse around refuge within broader discussions of Belize's legal, economic, and political destiny.

Furthermore, in contrast to British narratives that cast the figure of the refugee as almost exclusively white and male, the Yucatecans who moved to Belize were an ethnically mixed group that included many families.⁹ Some were of European descent and described as Hispanic or Spanish, but the vast majority were of indigenous (Maya) or mixed (mestizo) descent. In 1861, Maya and mestizo ethnic groups accounted for 57% of Belize's population and 86% of those living near the northern border.¹⁰ All refugees were not created equal. Caroline Shaw contends that the mid-nineteenth-century humanitarian moment was "robust enough to include foreigners of all political, social, religious, and race background." Although the category of refugee became universal and inclusive, the treatment of refugees varied greatly in Britain's overseas possessions.¹¹ The Belize refugee crisis reveals what happened when refugees were not white settlers. As the number of Maya among the refugees grew, the government began to regard the refugee crisis as a race crisis.

Through trials and error, with a mix of paternalism and legal maneuvering, the authorities found ways to incorporate and gain control over these new groups. Although they were valuable additions to the economy and unlocked the settlement's agricultural potential, the legislation excluded them from land ownership and political representation. By placing them under British protection, the administration claimed jurisdiction over foreign bodies, or what Lisa Ford has termed "settler sovereignty."¹² Turning migrants into refugees placed an additional burden on the newcomers: they had to demonstrate loyalty and obedience to the political and legal system that was supposed to protect them. The label of refugee was not only an opportunity to showcase British liberal and humanitarian values, it also became a way to control the Yucatecans, especially the Maya. Acts or behaviors deemed ungrateful or subversive justified

and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Fae Dussart and Alan Lester, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance: Protecting Aborigines Across the Nineteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Luke Glanville, *Sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect: A New History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Lauren Benton, Bain Atwood, Adam Clulow, eds. *Protection and Empire: A Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Matthew Hilton, Emily Baughan, Eleanor Davey, Bronwen Everill, Kevin O'Sullivan, Tehila Sasson, "History and Humanitarianism: A Conversation," *Past & Present* 241, no 1 (2018): 1–38.

⁸ Caroline Shaw, "Success in a Failed Campaign: The French Refugees of Jersey and the Making of an Abstract 'Right to Refuge,'" *Journal of British Studies* 57, no. 3 (2018): 493–515.

⁹ Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace*, 6–7, 80.

¹⁰ Bolland, *Formation*, 4.

¹¹ Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace*, 74–75; see also chapters four, five, and seven.

¹² Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in America and Australia, 1788–1836* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Rosa Torras Conangla, "Los refugiados mayas yucatecos en la colonización de El Petén: Vicisitudes de una frontera," *Boletín Americanista* 2, no. 69 (2014): 15–32.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

disenfranchisement; the line between worthy and unworthy refugees was blurred especially after Belize received the full support of the empire.¹³

This article builds on three strands of scholarship. First, as a study of the complexities involved in making claims to sovereignty in a quasi-colony, it adds to the growing research on the international turn taken in legal history and connects it to the Belizean Caste War.¹⁴ The population movement this provoked gave local officials the opportunity to shore up their sovereignty claims and portray themselves as protectors of British liberal principles in Central America. The response to the refugee crisis in the early years of the Caste War played a major role in securing the eventual declaration of colonial status in 1862.

Second, as a political and legal study of a contested space characterized by unclear jurisdiction and the resulting fluidity, this article draws on insights from borderlands scholars to show the importance of border regions in the construction of empires, since “the true laboratory of modern political thought is located not in Europe but in the space in between the metropole and the colony.”¹⁵ Executive and legislative representatives, particularly the superintendent and the chief justice, had tenuous control over a socially fragmented territory where many groups, ranging from Creole landowning merchants to woodcutters, refugees, Maya rebels, and military personnel, often questioned their authority and disagreed over the administration of the settlement. Many white British inhabitants embraced the settlement’s special status and were wary of direct forms of rule. Yucatecans often had little interest in playing the role of the good and compliant refugee: some continued to be involved in the conflicts on the Mexican side of the border while others wanted to be self-sufficient and interact with British institutions and employers as little as possible. The weakness of public institutions, the brevity of terms by office, labor shortages, contested borders, and the massive population movement in the wake of the Caste War all shaped the history of early imperial formation in Belize.

Third, although several scholars have covered the Caste War period in Belize and considered how this large-scale movement of people irreversibly altered the settlement’s demographic composition, they often neglect its impact on the legal and political landscape.¹⁶ By highlighting the discourse around asylum and protection in a border region, this

¹³ On this question of worthy and unworthy refugees today, Didier Fassin argues that debates about refugees have shifted from a legal question of rights to a moral question of favor, “The Precarious Truth of Asylum,” *Public Culture* 25, no. 1 (2013): 39–63.

¹⁴ Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, *Rage for Order: The British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 145–49; Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Shaunnagh Dorsett, “Traveling Laws: Buton and the Draft act for the Protection and Amelioration of the Aborigines 1838,” in *Legal Histories of the British Empire: Laws, Entanglements, and Legacies*, ed. Shannaugh Dorsett and John McLaren (New York: Routledge, 2014): 171–86; Jennifer Pitts, “Empire and Legal Universalisms in the Eighteenth Century,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (2012), 92–121.

¹⁵ Adam Sitze, “Foreword,” in Carlo Galli, *Political Spaces and Global War*, ed. Adam Sitze and trans. Elisabeth Fay (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxii. An excellent overview is Fabricio Prado, “The Fringes of Empires: Recent Scholarship on Colonial Frontiers and Borderlands in Latin America,” *History Compass* 10, no. 4 (2012): 318–33.

¹⁶ The main analysis is O. Nigel Bolland, *Colonialism and Resistance in Belize. Essays in Historical Sociology* (1988. Reprint, Belize: Cubola, 2003), 100–15, whose ethno-historical approach focuses on Maya resistance to the British. See also Angel Eduardo Cal, “Anglo Maya Contact in Northern Belize: A Study of British Policy toward the Maya during the Caste War of Yucatán, 1847–1872,” Master’s thesis, University of Calgary, 1983, which explores how local authorities supported the Santa Cruz Maya in their fight against the state of Yucatán and the Icaiche Maya; Elisabeth Cunin and Odile Hoffman, “From Colonial Domination to the Making of the Nation: Ethno-Racial Categories in Censuses and Reports and their Political Uses in Belize, 19th-20th centuries,” *Caribbean Studies* 41, no. 2 (2013): 31–60, looks at processes of racial-ethnic classification; Rajeshwari Dutt, “Business as Usual: Maya and Merchants on Yucatan-Belize border at the Onset of the Caste War,” *The Americas* 74, no. 2 (2017): 201–26, shows that merchants and traders influenced British policies towards the frontier. See also Dutt’s forthcoming book *Empire on Edge: The British Struggle for Order in Belize during Yucatán’s Caste War, 1847–1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

article shows how it consolidated white settler colonialism and the integration of imperial power. There has been no previous study on the role of Chief Justice Robert Temple (1843–1861), who used the population movement to strengthen English law in the settlement and to push for colonial status.

Protecting the refugee population was not merely intended to show that Belize epitomized British values and should therefore become a colony, but also to ensure, through colonial control, the extraction of resources, especially the refugees' agricultural labor. As a response to this movement of people across the border, local officials articulated a humanitarian discourse that pursued three concomitant objectives. The first was to extend and secure British sovereignty and jurisdiction over this contested territory and all those living in it, including non-British subjects. The second was to legitimize their administration both locally, towards a diverse and sometimes hostile population, and internationally, as part of a broader British humanitarian and expansionist moment. The third was to buttress claims for formal colonial status within the British Empire by putting in place a system that facilitated the disenfranchisement of refugees.

BUILDING A COLONY

When the first refugees of the Caste War arrived in 1847, Belizean officials had been striving to reform the contours of the political and legal system of the settlement for over two decades. Belize was governed by a mix of local customs and English laws that was representative of the improvisational nature of colonial or proto-colonial projects in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁷ The original settlers of the Bay of Honduras, called Baymen, dominated all forms of government. Their profits came from logwood and mahogany extracted by enslaved Africans. The local elite of Baymen and wood-traders ruled as what a superintendent called "a very arbitrary aristocracy."¹⁸

In 1786, the British government appointed a superintendent to govern the territory and represent its authority locally, but a minority of wealthy white inhabitants, drawn mainly from the mahogany business, continued to dominate local government through the Public Meeting, which elected magistrates overseeing the settlement's administration. Tensions ran high among different actors.¹⁹ In 1820, the superintendent arrested Major Thomas Bradley when he tried to take over command of the garrison. Bradley presented a petition to Parliament and charged the superintendent with usurping his power "in an inhuman and revolting manner."²⁰ Despite repeated demands from local authorities, the Secretary of State for the Colonies refused to establish criminal courts in the settlement, arguing that the Crown had no territorial rights.²¹

Efforts to restructure Belize's legal landscape began as a result of an 1825 visit by royal commissioners sent to investigate criminal and civil justice in the Caribbean.²² The commissioners recommended the extension of royal courts into the territory of Honduras.²³ Policymakers nevertheless remained cautious. The Colonial Office feared antagonizing

¹⁷ Herbert Curry, "British Honduras: From Public Meeting to Crown Colony," *The Americas* 13, no. 1 (1956), 27–28; Brendan Gillis, *The Specter of Peace* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 10–12.

¹⁸ Superintendent Despard, "Narrative," 1790, The National Archives U.K. [hereafter TNA] CO 123/10.

¹⁹ Bolland, *Colonialism*, 37; Curry, "British Honduras," 39–40.

²⁰ Superintendent and Commandant George Arthur to Lord Bathurst, Secretary of State for the Colonies, March 9, 1822, British Honduras papers, Cambridge University, Archives of the Royal Commonwealth Society [hereafter RCS/RCMS] 270, box 2.

²¹ Curry, "British Honduras," 38.

²² Ibid.

²³ Criminal and Civil Justice in the West Indies and South America, 2nd series, 3rd report, Parliamentary Papers, vol. 24, No. 3334, session 1829, 14.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Belize's neighbors, Mexico and Guatemala, which had secured their independence from Spain.²⁴ A mix of usage and custom continued in place until 1839 when a new superintendent declared that the law of England was the only law in Belize.²⁵ In practice, the superintendent struggled to find magistrates or people with legal training.²⁶

The 1840s were a decade of reconfiguration within the British Empire as the idea of a liberal imperial mission was embedded in British national identity. In the Pacific, the islands of what became New Zealand were officially annexed in 1840 and opened to direct settlement. The British sphere of influence extended in the Mediterranean to Malta and the Ionian Islands. The latter were not formally annexed to the empire but were protectorates, with a status similar to that of the settlement of Belize: Britain did not have full sovereignty over the territory but had extensive rights over the people and could apply English law. Resistance groups in the Ionian Islands began to contest British control in the 1840s.²⁷ Although settlers in Belize did not resist the British Empire in the way that other colonies and protectorates did, they opposed attempts to standardize the political and legal landscape.

In 1841, a group of settlers sent memorials to Parliament and the Secretary of State for the Colonies wishing to protect their autonomy. The petitioners defended their rights to enact their laws and to decide on their taxes. They based their demands on their continuing efforts as British subjects to create "an extended territory of our Mother Country [thanks to] the enterprising spirit of Mercantile adventure, more than to conquest and diplomacy." They celebrated their success in turning Belize from "a few wretched huts" into a flourishing trading center. The law of England were applied, the petitioners explained, "except in some few cases where the constructions of society and circumstances purely local rendered a deviation from them unavoidable." Playing on this image of a frontier society, petitioners wanted to remain, they stressed, "loyal yet free—obedient yet independent."²⁸ Faced with this resistance, the Secretary of State for the Colonies advised the superintendent to respect the "peculiar circumstances" of the settlement. He nevertheless decided to send a competent judge to Belize as soon as possible.²⁹

Two new administrators arrived in 1843: a new superintendent, Charles St. John Fancourt, a conservative politician, and the first chief justice of the settlement, Robert Temple, a barrister.³⁰ Their efforts to reform the political and legal system coincided with the outbreak of the Caste War in 1847. Temple, in particular, became instrumental in fashioning Belizean legal policy as a response to the large influx of foreigners. He might have been praised by policymakers in London as "the perfect representative of the rigour of the law in a place where there was no law," but he provoked the ire of white settlers who opposed direct rule from England and sometimes clashed with the ever-revolving cast of Superintendents (with four different incumbents between 1840 and 1862).³¹ Despite these challenges, Temple set out to transform Belize.

The flow of migrants from Yucatán elicited a re-thinking of the relations between international principles, local law, and English law. In the seventeenth-century, the jurist Edward Coke observed that nations were "sanctuaries for servants or

²⁴ Colonial Office, April 28, 1849, TNA, CO 123/57.

²⁵ Archibald Gibbs, *British Honduras: an historical and descriptive account of the colony from its settlement* (London, S. Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1883), 667.

²⁶ Minutes of 22 September 1841, TNA, CO 267/164.

²⁷ David Hannell, "The Ionian Islands under the British Protectorate: Social and Economic Problems," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 7, no 1 (1989): 105–132.

²⁸ *Honduras Observer*, March 10, 1841.

²⁹ Lord John Russell to Colonel Alexander MacDonald, February 8, 1842, TNA, CO 124/5.

³⁰ Lindsay Bristowe and Philip Wright, *The Handbook of British Honduras for 1888-1889* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1888), 32.

³¹ Cited in David Fieldhouse, ed., *Select Documents on the Constitutional on the Constitutional History of the British Empire and Commonwealth* (New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1985), 235; Gibbs, *British Honduras*, 106.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

subjects flying for safety from one kingdom to another.”³² Temple decided to apply what he saw as core concepts of both English and international law to Belize. Three principles guided his policy towards those who crossed the border: neutrality, hospitality, and protection. Drawing on early modern legal theorists Hugo Grotius and Samuel von Pufendorf, Temple articulated Belize’s status as “a neutral state” in a Supreme Court decision in 1848. Belize, as a “civilized nation,” had no right to interfere in the Caste War. Temple went further: neutrality implied the right of hospitality and the right of hospitality, in turn, meant protection.³³ His argumentation on behalf of the refugees was part and parcel of a wider Atlantic debate on the responsibility to protect.³⁴

Belize’s treatment of refugees, as Temple saw it, was a litmus test for Belize’s status as a “civilized” state in both the British world and the international community. He addressed two issues: the right to apply English law in the grey zone that was Belize and the limits of this jurisdiction. On the first matter, Temple insisted on British rights through settlement: “British Honduras is not a ceased or a conquered colony,” he announced, “it is a settled colony –and title to it ... by occupation.”³⁵ In addition to drawing on the works of scholars of international law, Temple turned to English legal principles and the seventeenth-century expert on common law, Matthew Hale: “To kill an enemy in England is murder.”³⁶ He then turned to precedents and the 1817 Murders Abroad Act, which declared that offenders would be tried in the settlement of Belize.³⁷ Temple concluded that no distinction should be made between subjects and foreigners even in territories that were not formally part of the empire. When two British settlers murdered the “Spaniard” Antonio Cruz, Temple told the Grand Jury that Cruz was “as much entitled to the protection of [Her Majesty’s] laws, as any of her subjects.”³⁸ The Supreme Court decided in 1848 that all crimes committed in the settlement should be tried in Belize.³⁹

While asserting the principles of neutrality, hospitality, and protection, Temple still had to resolve a second issue: Belize had unclear boundaries. Anglo-Spanish treaties of 1783 and 1786 had established British rights to settle between the Sibun and Hondo rivers. After Mexico and Central America secured their independence from Spain, Britain negotiated a treaty with Mexico in 1826 recognizing the Hondo River as a border. This river was at the heart of territorial contests among British, Mexican, and Maya groups (Chan Santa Cruz, Icaiche, and other indigenous and mestizo groups).⁴⁰ Turning once again to Hugo Grotius, Temple asserted that the boundaries and limits of countries followed windings of rivers, extending the “laws of that country and the authority of its rulers ... to an imaginary line in mid-stream.”⁴¹

As a result of Temple’s argumentation, most legal cases in this period centered on the territorial limits of British jurisdiction, especially for crimes committed around the Hondo River. Witnesses were called to court to explain the locations of the crimes: where shots were fired, where blows were made, and where men died. This imaginary line in the middle of the river gained paramount importance. In at least two cases, the jury decided that the crime was

³² Sir Edward Coke, *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England* (London: W. Clarke, 1809), 180.

³³ Supreme Court of British Honduras, Temple’s charge to the jury, August 22, 1848, RCS/RCMS 268/1.

³⁴ Dussart and Lester, *Colonization*, 37–76.

³⁵ Supreme Court of British Honduras, Temple’s charge to the jury, August 22, 1848, RCS/RCMS 268/1. Emphasis in the original.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Act of Parliament 59 Geo. III chap. 44, 1817. This act was supplemented by the Trials of Murders, Manslaughters, Rapes, Robberies, and Burglaries committed in Honduras Act in 1819, Act of Parliament 59 Geo. III, chap. 44, 1819.

³⁸ Report of Trial of 17 October 1846, RCS/RCMS 269/22.

³⁹ Supreme Court of British Honduras, Temple’s charge to the jury, August 22, 1848, RCS/RCMS 268/2.

⁴⁰ Laura Caso Barrera and Mario M. Alíphat Fernández, “De antiguos territorios coloniales a nuevas fronteras republicanas: la Guerra de Castas y los límites del suroeste de México, 1821-1893,” *Historia Crítica*, 59 (2016): 81–100; Christine Kray and Jason Yaeger, “Re-Centering the Narrative: British Colonial Memory and the San Pedro Maya,” in *Archaeology of the British Empire in Latin America*, ed. Charles E. Orser, Jr. (New York: Springer, 2019), 73–97.

⁴¹ Supreme Court of British Honduras, Temple’s charge to the jury, August 22, 1848, RCS/RCMS 268/2.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

committed on the Mexican side and therefore out of the jurisdiction of the Belizean court.⁴² In both cases, the murder victims were anonymous, merely described as “Indians” in the trial records. Temple appointed a magistrate to the Northern District in 1849, two years after the first refugees had arrived from Yucatán.⁴³

Boundary disputes emerged once again in 1854 when the Mexican Minister in London complained that British settlers had illegally extended their properties across the Hondo River and he claimed compensation for the usurpation of land.⁴⁴ The Colonial Office replied that neither government could ascertain the exact boundaries between Belize and Mexico. Although they did not encourage trespass on Mexican property, they refused to fund a survey.⁴⁵ The encroachment complaints were nevertheless forwarded to the superintendent of Belize who stressed the practical difficulties of surveying the boundaries of Honduras; he also warned about potential trouble with Indian inhabitants, who considered this territory theirs.⁴⁶

The authorities strove to extend not only British jurisdiction over individuals coming from Yucatán, but also diplomatic protection. When two Yucatecans staying in the border town of Ramonal were abducted by Maya rebels and taken across the river to the Mexican side, the authorities were outraged at this disrespect of British sovereignty.⁴⁷ The kidnapped men lived under the protection of English law. The coroner of Belize sought help from a Maya commandant to rescue the two men and punish the kidnappers. The commandant ordered one of the kidnappers to be shot for disrespecting Belize’s right of asylum and disobeying his orders. The coroner was pleased and reported, “this painful proceeding [shows] how rapidly these people punish those who offend the English or those who live under the protection of their flag. I sincerely hope it will prove conducive to promoting the happiness of the Spaniards who have immigrated into this settlement for protection.”⁴⁸ The authorities wanted to send a clear message: Belize was a place of safety and equity and all inhabitants were under the exclusive protection of English laws.

Rivers were not Chief Justice Temple’s only concern in his campaign to standardize the legal landscape of the settlement. High seas were also uncharted spaces. In a piracy case brought against three Mexican citizens in 1848, Temple remarked that Belize courts did not have admiralty jurisdiction and had to send the prisoners as well as the witnesses to Jamaica, which had an admiralty court. This loophole was particularly outrageous, Temple noted, considering the high number of vessels passing off the coast of Belize. In response to protests by Temple and other administrators in the British world, the government passed the Admiralty Offences Act in August 1849 granting all courts in the British colonies jurisdiction over admiralty offenses, including “any person” charged with crimes committed upon seas, rivers or creeks. After the act arrived in Jamaica, it was carried to Belize on the same ship that brought the prisoners back to be tried for piracy.⁴⁹ Although Belize was still a settlement and not a colony, Temple’s strategy to secure admiralty jurisdiction within the borders of Honduras moved the settlement closer to colonial status.

By 1850, policymakers in England had finally decided that the settlement had become part of the dominions of Britain.⁵⁰ In 1852 the writ of habeas corpus was made available to the settlement. In 1853, an act disbanded the Public Meeting,

⁴² Queen vs. Rafael Monteil and Domingo Martinez for murder of an Indian, name unknown; queen vs Juan Micanor Oliear, and Domingo Martinez, for murder of an Indian, name unknown, August 22, 1848, RCS/RCMS 268/2.

⁴³ Luke Smyth O’Connor, “An exploring ramble among the Indios bravos, in British Honduras,” *Littell’s Living Age* 34 (1852), 513.

⁴⁴ Mexican Minister to Clarendon, May 16, 1853, TNA, FO 50/272.

⁴⁵ Clarendon to Consul of Mexico, July 4, 1854, TNA, FO 50/272.

⁴⁶ Superintendent to Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica, September 16, 1854, TNA, CO 123/89 and Governor of Jamaica to Lord Grey, October 4, 1854, TNA, CO 123/89.

⁴⁷ Cited in Dutt, “Business as Usual,” 218.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Supreme Court, Case for piracy upon high seas, October 1850, RCS/RCMS 268/3.

⁵⁰ Parkinson to Lord Grey, November 16, 1852, TNA, CO 123/85.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

which has been in place for about a century and introduced a new Legislative Assembly. This constitutional reform gave the Colonial Office, through the superintendent, greater power. The Superintendent could draw up legislation and give or withhold consent to bills introduced by the Legislative Assembly. A formal constitution was drawn up in London and submitted to local authorities who ratified it in 1854. The new constitution gave Belize the form of a British West Indian colony, but the British government still refused to proclaim the settlement a colony.⁵¹ In 1855, the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court was enlarged with a criminal jurisdiction and legislation identical with the English system.

Legislative and executive authorities in Belize not only attempted to monopolize sovereignty and consolidate power within the frontiers of the settlement, but also sought to integrate Yucatecans by embracing the idea of trusteeship, popular with the British Colonial Office at the time.⁵² After the formation of the Aborigines Protection Society in 1836, a parliamentary committee suggested measures to secure protection, civilization, and justice for native people.⁵³ Officials in Belize regarded Yucatecans both as a population to protect and enlighten and as a solution to the economic needs of the settlement. Edmund Burke, a magistrate in the Northern District, noted that the migrants grew corn, tobacco, and sugarcane. He predicted that this work, combined with education and Anglicization, would "elevate" them to "their proper rank in the scale of civilization."⁵⁴ The authorities noted that Maya refugees engaged in mahogany cutting or independent farming while mestizos had imported their much-valued sugarcane expertise. However, the administration worried about how to best access and capitalize on these resources. Land and population control were sources of anxiety. In the decade following the beginning of the Caste War, British officials held on to the hope that the newcomers were the answers to the settlement's labor and agricultural problems as long as they could be molded into productive and obedient subjects.

A CITY OF REFUGE

For foreigners to cross the border into Belize was not a new phenomenon. People had been moving back and forth since the eighteenth century. Some British refugees in the late eighteenth century even took refuge in Yucatán, fleeing mistreatment in logging camps or persecution because they were Catholic.⁵⁵ Until the Caste War, Belize had adopted a hostile policy towards migrants with regulations in 1812, 1814, 1815, and 1820 prohibiting foreigners to reside in the settlement without permission. The superintendent often complained to the magistrates that these regulations were ignored: "the settlement is quite infested with vagrant Spaniards and other Foreigners who are first illegally introduced, and then no less illegally employed." He demanded help to expel them and to prosecute those who sheltered or employed these illegal migrants. The Baymen, who controlled the Public Meeting and needed cheap labor in logging camps, ignored these demands.⁵⁶

By the time the conflicts in Yucatán began in 1847, the dissolution of the Public Meeting had consolidated political and legal powers in the hands of the superintendent and the chief justice. Yet now that these officials had greater power than ever before to implement a more restrictive regulation of the borders, they instead constructed a political and legal argumentation defending Yucatecans as refugees and emphasizing the British responsibility to protect them. This

⁵¹ Curry, "British Honduras," 41.

⁵² On colonial humanitarian governance in Honduras, Fester and Dussart, *Colonization*, 45–60.

⁵³ Andrew Porter, "Trusteeship, Antislavery and Humanitarianism," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, volume III: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3: 198–221.

⁵⁴ Edmund Burke to William Stevenson, May 28, 1855, TNA, CO 123/90.

⁵⁵ Matthew Restall, "Crossing to Safety? Frontier Flight in Eighteenth-Century Belize and Yucatán," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 94, no. 3 (2014), 409–11.

⁵⁶ Lieutenant Governor to Magistrates, January 9, 1822, RCSM 270/48.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

line of reasoning resulted from a mix of practical and ideological concerns. Their open-door policy was, in the first instance, a result of the vulnerability of the settlement:

Belize lacked a standing army to defend its borders and depended on the goodwill of the British authorities in Jamaica—three to seven days away—for protection. Unable to control the massive influx of Yucatecs, an open-door policy was the pragmatic option. A Baptist missionary noted that the Maya refugees “have asked for British protection, if not incorporation.”⁵⁷ The fear that the hostilities of the Caste War would spill over the border remained ever present.

A second factor was economic. Both authorities and landowners soon regarded Yucatecs as a way to develop agriculture for export and domestic consumption especially as mahogany prices, then the main source of income for the settlement, were falling. In 1848, the Superintendent placed a commercial agent on the border to advise “the Indians with a view of leading them to peaceful and industrial occupations.”⁵⁸ Many refugees were farmers and started to cultivate sugar and other crops in the Northern District.⁵⁹ Chief Justice Temple noted that the newcomers brought their tobacco-growing skills and knowledge with them; he hoped that, “as good tobacco might be produced in Honduras as ... in Cuba.”⁶⁰

A third factor in the adoption of an open-door policy was international diplomacy. White Yucatecan elites reached out to the United States for support against the Mexican government. U.S. President James Polk considered the idea of annexing Yucatán.⁶¹ If this alliance never materialized, the United States remained interested in the region. The U.S. consul in Belize interceded with local authorities to help white Yucatecs. He wrote that the government refused to help these “poor wretches” ravaged by disease and hunger, even saying no to providing coffins for the dead.⁶² In the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850, Britain and the United States agreed to refrain from occupying or colonizing parts of Central America. Whereas the British interpreted the treaty as applying to future occupations, the United States insisted that Britain relinquish all existing territories. Britain evacuated the Bay Islands and the Mosquito Coast in eastern Nicaragua but held on to Belize.⁶³ Increasing the size of Belize’s population while projecting its image as a country of refuge was a way to keep the United States at arm’s length.

It was key to the Belizean strategy was to portray the newcomers as worthy of protection. Whereas the Mexican government painted the rebels as bloodthirsty savages—for example, the Mexican paper *El Fénix* regularly published updates on what it called the “Guerra de Bárbaros” or the barbarian war—Chief Justice Temple emphasized the productive potential of these new workers.⁶⁴ In a paper on the history of British Honduras read before the Society of

⁵⁷ Frederick Crow, *The Gospel in Central America* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1850), 470. On missionaries and humanitarianism in other parts of the empire, especially Sierra Leone. See, for example, see Bronwen Everill, “Bridgeheads of Empire? Liberated African Missionaries in West Africa,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41 (2012): 789-805; Padraic X Scanlan, “The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery: The Liberated African Villages of Sierra Leone, 1815-1823,” *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 4 (2016): 1085–1113.

⁵⁸ Hempstead to Buchanan, July 29, 1848, Despatches from U.S. consuls in Belize, NARA, T334, roll 1.

⁵⁹ Superintendent to Governor of Jamaica, July 16, 1857, TNA, FO 39/3.

⁶⁰ *DeBow Review* 6, no. 6 (June 1869), 461.

⁶¹ Louis De Armond, “Justo Sierra O’Reilly and Yucatecan-United States Relations, 1847-1848,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 31, no. 3 (1951): 420–36.

⁶² Hempstead to Buchanan, July 29, 1848, Despatches from U.S. consuls in Belize, NARA, National Archives Microfilm Publication T334, roll 1.

⁶³ David Kazanjian, *The Brink of Freedom: Improvising Life in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 133–53.

⁶⁴ *El Fénix*, December 25, 1849. See Ginón Xhail Bojorquez Palma, “Opinión y poder: juegos de la prensa en Yucatán durante la Guerra de Castas,” *Americanía. Revista de Estudios Latinoamericanos* 2 (2015): 74–98. For a discussion of eighteenth-century Spanish terms (bárbaros, salvajes, bravos) as “savage,” see David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and their Savages in the Age of*



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Arts in London in 1857, Temple praised the Indians and the mestizos for their “symmetry, and muscular development ... splendid models for a Hercules.” The reference to the ancient mythological hero of Hercules, famous for his strength and stamina, was intentional. In the eyes of Temple, the refugees were splendid models for industrious workers: economic and humanitarian motives went hand in hand.

The influx of people from Yucatán turned Belize into what Temple proudly called a “city of refuge.”⁶⁵ Invoking the Levitical cities of refuge, he highlighted the virtue of the suffering refugees and upheld the town of Belize (and British Honduras more broadly) as a place of sanctuary and protection.⁶⁶ The superintendent of Belize wrote the lieutenant governor of Jamaica that Yucatecans left the chaos and violence of Mexico behind them and found a home in what he described as “a tolerably strong and abundant liberal Government,” ruled by the principles of freedom of movement, the absence of military conscription, lack of arbitrary taxes, and peace.⁶⁷

Journal articles, historical accounts, and memoirs replicated the same narrative: on one side of the border, the population of Yucatán suffered under the violence of the war and /or the despotic rule of the Mexican government while, on the other side, Belize represented a place of refuge, law, and order. An account written by a Methodist missionary to the Wesleyan office in London explained that the conflicts in Yucatán caused “many to flee ... and seek a place of safety and a home.” Extolling the benefits of British rule, he noted that the Indians living in Belize were “quiet and well-behaved,” while those in Yucatán were cruel and thieving.⁶⁸ In 1852, a travel account in the U.S. magazine *Littell's Living Age* explained that refugees “driven by the bloodshed and plunder carried on between the Yucatacos and Indians,” sought protection of the British.⁶⁹

Historical accounts circulated the same narrative. The *Handbook of British Honduras* in London noted that Yucatecan families had escaped the “cruelties and misgovernment of the authorities” and found “refuge” in Belize.⁷⁰ Memoirs also focused on the plight of refugees and the benevolence of British rule. The Yucatecan José Maria Rosado was living in Bacalar, near the border between Belize and Quintana Roo, when Maya rebels captured the town in 1858. He escaped and settled across the border. When he later wrote his memoirs, he gave them the title: *A Refugee of the War of the Castes Makes Belize His Home*.⁷¹ In his history of Honduras written in the late nineteenth century, Archibald Gibbs explained that “refugees from Yucatán” had been “driven into exile by the disturbed state of their own country.”⁷²

These efforts by various actors to portray individuals crossing the border—many of them indigenous Maya—as refugees were also part of a wider interest in pre-Hispanic cultures that swept through the Atlantic world in the middle of the nineteenth century.⁷³ European and American archaeologists, artists, and missionaries traveled through Mexico and Central America to research pre-Hispanic civilizations. The first British expedition to explore Maya monuments in the

Enlightenment (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 12–15.

⁶⁵ *Journal of the Society of the Arts* 5, no. 217 (January 1857), 121.

⁶⁶ On the centrality of religious language and morality in humanitarian narratives, see Abigail Green, “Humanitarianism in nineteenth-century context: religious, gendered, national,” *The Historical Journal* 57, no. 4 (2014): 1157–75.

⁶⁷ Superintendent to Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica, July 16, 1857, TNA, FO 39/3.

⁶⁸ Richard Fletcher to Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, December 30, 1867, in *Maya Wars: Ethnographic Accounts from Nineteenth-Century Yucatán*, ed. Terry Rugeley (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 104 and 110.

⁶⁹ O'Connor, “Exploring ramble,” 513.

⁷⁰ Bristowe and Wright, *Handbook*, 27.

⁷¹ “Captivity Narrative of José Maria Rosado” (1915) in Rugeley, *Maya Wars*, 68–78.

⁷² Gibbs, *British Honduras*, 4.

⁷³ Robert D. Aguirre, “Agencies of the Letter: The Foreign Office and the Ruins of Central America,” *Victorian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2004), 290–92.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Yucatán Peninsula left Belize in 1839.⁷⁴ The superintendent of Honduras donated Maya antiquities to the British Museum in 1857 and Chief Justice Temple described the objects as “a treasure trove.”⁷⁵ These travel narratives and museum exhibits romanticized the Maya as belonging to a bygone era.

Mexicans pointed to the hypocrisy of the British, accusing them of hiding their imperial ambitions under this lofty discourse of Belize as a place of refuge and protection. A pamphlet published in Mexico City noted that the British ignored “the Law of Nations ... to satisfy their ambition and their desires to increase their wealth,” while thousands of lives in Yucatán were “sacrificed” and “destroyed” during this brutal war.⁷⁶

Chief Justice Temple’s religious framing of Belize as a city of refuge was a double-edged sword. In the Old Testament, these cities were places where those who had unintentionally committed murder could escape blood revenge. The line between refugee and criminals was thin. Divisions existed among local administrators. Temple embraced the idea of a city of refuge as a way to turn Belize into an enlightened and civilized place in the midst of a wilderness. Meanwhile, Superintendent Seymour feared that Belize would turn into a sanctuary for criminals, arguing, “If we are to continue to receive the scourgings of the populations of neighboring countries including some of the greatest ruffians the world can produce, the Central executive authority must be invested with unusual powers to protect the great, but often attacked prosperity of the settlement.”⁷⁷ But whether the city of refuge was lauded as part of the civilizing mission and the liberal benevolence of the British Empire or was decried as exposing the weakness of the settlement and the need for greater support from the metropole, the chief justice and the superintendent shared the same ambition that Belize should become a colony.

Categorizing the newcomers as refugees was a particularity fraught process. In many cases, when officials used the term “refugee,” they referred to whites and mestizos. Administrators struggled with the concept of Maya or Indians as political refugees.⁷⁸ They placed them in an uneasy position between peace-loving refugees fleeing a cruel war, like white liberals in Europe and passive victims, like indigenous people in other parts of the empire. But unlike indigenous people elsewhere, the Yucatecans had not been displaced by British settlers and British rule; they had become settlers occupying a British space. As such, the superintendent viewed British protection as bestowing privileges and rights in return for loyalty, explaining, “By the word ‘loyalty’ I do not wish to confine my meaning to dutiful attachment to the Crown of England as that is not to be expected of aliens, but I include within the scope of that word what may be reasonably be claimed from these strangers: good faith and fidelity towards existing institutions of this settlement by which they are benefitted.”⁷⁹

As Hannah Weiss Muller has demonstrated regarding subjecthood in the eighteenth-century British Empire, the authorities in Belize understood belonging within the extended British community as a reciprocal bond.⁸⁰ They demanded that the refugees show loyalty, not to the Crown as with native-born subjects, but to British institutions and legal protection, which, in return, were supposed to benefit them. In the seventeenth-century, Edward Coke had theorized this reciprocal bond when he explained that aliens living in England, whether or not they were naturalized,

⁷⁴ John Alder Burdon, *Archives of British Honduras* (London: Sifton, Praed and Co., 1935), 3: 409.

⁷⁵ British Museum Records, 1757-1878: 207-211; Temple, “Notes on Treasure Trove,” *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 15, no.1 (1859): 100-104.

⁷⁶ Lázaro Pavía, *Los Ingleses en México: o sea en origen y fundación de las colonias Británicas en el seno mexicano* (México: Imprenta de José V. Castillo, 1888), 9.

⁷⁷ Superintendent to Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica, September 17, 1858, TNA, CO 123/97.

⁷⁸ Wayne M. Clegern, *British Honduras: Colonial Dead End, 1859-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 10-11.

⁷⁹ Superintendent to Burke and Blake, May 8, 1858, TNA, CO 123/96.

⁸⁰ Hannah Weiss Muller, *Subjects and Sovereign: Bonds of Belonging in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7-8.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

owed the king obedience in return for protection.⁸¹ This concept of loyalty, or “good faith and fidelity,” as the superintendent defined it, was fraught with ambivalence; the administration used it to control and punish the refugees they deemed ungrateful.

Belize’s attitude towards the refugees was determined not only by humanitarian interests but also with a view to implementing effective regulation of this diverse population. Protecting the refugees meant controlling them. The authorities introduced policies, notably the Foreigners’ Registration Act of 1847, which forced Yucatecans to purchase tickets of residence when they returned to Mexico for business.⁸² The superintendent informed the Mexican commandant in Bacalar that travelers with a ticket of residence enjoyed British protection and were not to be molested.⁸³

These tickets served at least two purposes. The first was to draw a distinction between worthy and unworthy refugees. Suspicious individuals were denied tickets as authorities hoped to curb the arms trade from Belize to Yucatán. The administration repeatedly cautioned the refugees that they would lose the right of British protection if they engaged in subversive activities: the superintendent briefly passed legislative measures in 1856 authorizing the “removal of certain aliens and other persons under circumstances of suspicion.”⁸⁴ The second purpose of this registration policy was to limit the risk of tensions with the Mexican authorities. If travelers without tickets got into trouble with the government on the Mexican side of the border, British responsibility was not engaged.

The process of registration should not be overestimated. The Belizean state lacked the infrastructure to control large numbers of people. Only a quarter of the refugees in Corozal in the Northern District, for example, or 2,000 adult men, received tickets.⁸⁵ However, these tickets marked the beginnings of Belize’s attempts to project diplomatic protection and sovereignty extraterritorially. Although the authorities proclaimed their neutrality, they started to intervene outside of their borders. In 1857, the superintendent argued that the lack of law and order on the Mexican side justified extraterritorial interventions. He received authorization from the government in London to use troops on the Hondo River, as well as to permit pursuit on Mexican territory.⁸⁶ A delicate geopolitical balance was struck as the British government warned the Superintendent not to offend the Mexican government.⁸⁷

A COLONY OF FOREIGNERS

The late 1850s saw increasingly tense relations between the administration and the refugees. On the one hand, Yucatecans increased the settlement’s agricultural production. On the other, clashes at the border made the refugees look like threats to the security of Belize. Other incidents added to this volatile situation. British loggers moved further into the northern interior in search of mahogany and, as the Icaiche Maya considered these logging camps part of their territory, they demanded rent.⁸⁸ At the same time, confrontations with Mexican commissioners stopping and searching

⁸¹ Coke, “Calvin’s Case,” Calvin’s Case 7 Co. Rep. 1a, 77 ER 377, in *The Reports of Sir Edward Coke, In Thirteen Parts, A New Edition* (London, Joseph Butterworth and Son 1826), 4: 10.

⁸² Gibbs, *British Honduras*, 107.

⁸³ Burdon, *Archives*, 3: 135

⁸⁴ William Stevenson to the Governor of Jamaica, August 11, 1856, TNA, CO 123/94. Two years earlier, a circular cautioned Mexican citizens that they would lose the right of British protection if they engaged in acts of insurrection, “Circular addressed to the Mexican citizens Don Sebastian Mole and eight others residing in British Honduras,” March 17, 1854, TNA, CO 123/89.

⁸⁵ Bolland, *Colonialism*, 113.

⁸⁶ Derby to Lafragua, July 28, 1874, TNA, FO 50/433.

⁸⁷ Henry Labouchere to Governor of Jamaica, December 12, 1857, TNA, FO 50/433.

⁸⁸ Superintendent to Governor of Jamaica, August 13, 1857, TNA, FO 39/3.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

British embarkations on the Hondo River provoked outcries by both the Mexican and the Belizean governments, accusing each other of breaching territorial sovereignty.⁸⁹

A dramatic shift in the administration's perception of refugees occurred in 1858. The Chan Santa Cruz Maya seized Bacalar in March. Located north of the border near the Hondo River, Bacalar was an important trading center. When the Chan Santa Cruz took some inhabitants prisoner, an expedition left the capital of Belize to negotiate for their release.⁹⁰ On their arrival, they reported that the town was strewn with dead bodies. The rebel general demanded that the British turn over the Mexican commander of Bacalar, who had taken refuge in Belize, in exchange for the prisoners.⁹¹ The British expedition refused and some hostages, including women, were killed.⁹²

Outraged at these violations of the traditional rules of war, the superintendent asked the governor of Jamaica for reinforcements.⁹³ The British increased their military presence in the Northern District and sent a few steamer gunboats to the Hondo River. They eventually refused to collaborate with the Mexican authorities to launch a punitive expedition against Chan Santa Cruz-controlled Bacalar, upholding a policy of neutrality.⁹⁴ The superintendent published a poster in Spanish reminding the population that even foreigners living in the settlement had to be neutral in the war across the border.⁹⁵ The administration passed an act authorizing the deportation of people "who seek to embroil us in disputes with which we have nothing to do."⁹⁶ The act was in place for a year as a warning. In practice, the administration did not have the infrastructure to implement it.

The so-called Bacalar massacre marked a shift in the administration's treatment of the refugees. The approach, embodied by Chief Justice Temple, which embraced the idea of Belize as a "city of refuge," showcasing British liberal values and legal traditions in the American wilderness, was on the wane. The approach, embodied by Superintendent Seymour, which assumed that a "city of refuge" attracted criminals and required stronger institutional support, began to prevail. Seymour explained this shift in a letter to the governor of Jamaica: "A more intimate acquaintance with our Yucateco immigrants has considerably weakened the sympathy with which I looked at these victims of many misfortunes and ought to alleviate their sufferings."⁹⁷

Nevertheless, the administration did not have the means to implement a massive deportation of subversive and disloyal immigrants. They adopted different strategies to incorporate the refugees into Belizean society. They even considered a more flexible political system in the Maya refugee villages of the Northern District. In 1858, the superintendent and the Legislative Assembly passed an act importing the Spanish colonial tradition of the *alcalde*, or the equivalent of a municipal magistrate. The superintendent appointed *alcaldes* who exercised jurisdiction among their communities and were responsible for police courts, criminal jurisdiction, petty debt, and registering foreigners. They reported to the court in the capital. This devolution of power did not last long. Communication issues multiplied in this multi-lingual

⁸⁹ Captain William Anderson to Superintendent, February 15, 1858, in Rugeley, *Maya Wars*, 65–67.

⁹⁰ Superintendent to Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica, March 13, 1858, TNA, CO 123/96.

⁹¹ Paul Sullivan, *Unfinished Conversations: Mayas and Foreigners Between Two Wars* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 120.

⁹² Superintendent to Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica, March 13, 1858, TNA, FO 39/5; Clegern, *British Honduras*, 13.

⁹³ Superintendent to Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica, February 17, 1858, TNA, FO 39/5.

⁹⁴ Superintendent to Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica, July 17, 1858, in Burdon, *Archives*, 3: 207–8; Superintendent to Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica, June 22, 1859, in Burdon, *Archives*, 3: 225.

⁹⁵ Lieutenant Seymour, *Bando*, 8 March 1858, Biblioteca Virtual de Yucatán XI-1855-054, accessed 15 April 2019, <http://www.bibliotecavirtualdeyucatan.com.mx>

⁹⁶ Act for removal of aliens, Superintendent to Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica, March 13, 1858, TNA, CO 123/96.

⁹⁷ Superintendent to Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica, September 17, 1858, TNA, CO 123/97.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

society and the administration decided to insert this network of alcaldes within a police force made up of British and Afro-American groups who were regarded as more loyal to the Crown.⁹⁸

As the administration disenfranchised Maya and mestizo migrants by excluding them from state organizations, they simultaneously launched a legal campaign to control access to resources. Shortly after the so-called Bacalar massacre, the administration passed the first Honduras Land Titles Act, drafted in London, allowing England-based investors to purchase land in the settlement. A handful of businesses like the British Honduras Company purchased most of the land.⁹⁹

Landownership policies became formally racialized. When the newly funded Legislative Assembly granted land titles, Maya were not allowed to own land and could only rent or become wage laborers. A series of land acts passed between 1855 and 1861 bolstered this unequal structure. The policy continued after Belize became a colony. A series of ordinances in the 1870s upheld this principle and introduced a reservation system.¹⁰⁰ This exclusionary land policy was extended to Maya-cultivated lands in the Toledo District on the southern border, near the Sarstoon River, which became part of the settlement after an 1859 treaty between Guatemala and Britain. Although English law and jurisdiction included all those living in the settlement, regardless of their racial group or place of birth, landownership became racially segregated. The majority of inhabitants—native or foreign-born non-white settlers—were almost totally excluded from landownership.

Employers played a major role in tightening control of refugees in the north. As the reports of the magistrates in the major refugee towns of Corozal and Orange Walk indicated, employers paid Maya workers using a combination of low wages and ration credits, creating a widespread system of debt in which the cost of food, alcohol, and shelter frequently exceeded what the workers were owed. The reports also showed that Maya often protested labor conditions and preferred to work independently but, unsurprisingly, most discipline cases were resolved in favor of employers.¹⁰¹

While white settler colonialism was enshrined within the borders of Belize, Temple was also active in two campaigns outside of the settlement. The first to increase the population of Belize through immigration acts passed in the 1860s.¹⁰² Landowners pushed for people they saw as suitable for agricultural work --migrants from China.¹⁰³ Many of them died or fled to Yucatán as result of poor food, overwork, and cruel treatment.¹⁰⁴ Some refused to work in exploitative conditions and the authorities feared that they would form an alliance with Yucatecans to launch a coordinated resistance.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Address by Superintendent to Legislative Assembly, January 21, 1858, TNA, CO 126/3. A detailed account of the alcalde system is in Bolland, *Colonialism*, 133–38.

⁹⁹ Nigel O. Bolland, "Labour control and resistance in Belize in the century after 1838," *Slavery and Abolition* 7, no. 2 (1986), 178; Torrens O. Nigel Bolland and Assad Shoman, *Land in Belize, 1765-1871* (Mona: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1977), 72–80.

¹⁰⁰ Bolland and Shoman, *Land in Belize*, 66; Greg Taylor, "Torrens' Contemporaneous Antipodean Simulacrum," *American Journal of Legal History* 49, no. 4 (2007), 400; Christine Kray, Minette Church and Jason Yaeger, "Designs on/of the Land: Competing Visions, Displacement, and Landscape Memory in British Colonial Honduras," in *Legacies of Space and Intangible Heritage: Archaeology, Ethnohistory, and the Politics of Cultural Continuity in the Americas*, ed. Fernando Armstrong-Fumero and Julio Hoil Gutierrez (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2017): 53–78.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 116–20.

¹⁰² *London Standard*, March 10, 1863, 2.

¹⁰³ *British Honduras Colonist and Belize Advertiser*, March 11, 1865, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Burdon, *Archives*, 3: 262–67.

¹⁰⁵ Secretary of State to Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica, September 22, 1865, Burdon, *Archives*, 3: 264.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Temple encouraged African Americans to escape persecution and discrimination in the United States and move to Belize. They should not, he insisted, move to the independent republics of Central America, which were ravaged by wars and internal struggles, and where "life and property are alike unprotected." As always, Temple lauded Belize as a land of equality, justice, and opportunity, where, he claimed, "the white and the black man are equally protected by the law." The land was fertile and Temple offered prospective migrants the chance to lease Crown land for a very low rent, so that "you and your brethren—as many as you like—hundreds, thousands—[who] will come here with stout hearts and determined minds" could grow much-needed agricultural staples.¹⁰⁶ The lack of success of these labor migration schemes convinced the authorities to turn their attention to white settlers.¹⁰⁷ They hoped that "enterprising Settlers" would replace the "disaffected and lazy refugees from Yucatán."¹⁰⁸ The defeat of the Confederacy after the Civil War (1861–5) meant that embittered white Southerners now entered the migration market. Temple wrote a series of articles for the widely circulated southern periodical *DeBow's Review*, using the same arguments he used with African Americans.¹⁰⁹

If Temple's immigration plans attracted only a handful of African Americans and white Southerners, his campaign to obtain colonial status was more successful. In his presentation on the history, trade, and natural resources of Belize to the Society of Arts in London in 1857, Temple despaired that British Honduras was "a country which has never been mentioned without a sneer." He noted that most people imagined Belize as a land "full of swamps, frogs, toads and venomous reptiles" while sitting at desks made with gorgeous mahogany—the settlement's main export.¹¹⁰ Belize was a "civilized" country and its economic potential, he insisted, was boundless.

The influx of Yucatecans played a major role in the transition of Belize from settlement to colony. The refugees worked in timber extraction, grew corn, tobacco, and especially sugar cane.¹¹¹ In 1861, the Legislative Assembly petitioned for colonial status, wishing to secure the "extraordinary extent" to which the Yucatecans ("though most primitive") had unlocked the agricultural potential of the territory.¹¹² By then, almost 400,000 pounds of sugar a year were produced in Belize.¹¹³ The Crown agreed and Belize became a colony in 1862. The superintendent gained the title of lieutenant governor. Most travel or historical accounts circulated the image of Belize as a place of extractable resources.¹¹⁴

Chief Justice Temple did not see his efforts come to fruition. He often clashed with Superintendents: one of them accused him of receiving bribes from mahogany cutters.¹¹⁵ Many settlers refused to serve as jurors. He fined the editor of the *Honduras Observer and Belize Gazette* £100 when the paper published a letter in which he called the jurors "scum and scourings."¹¹⁶ The settlers immediately complained to the Secretary of State for the Colonies about this arbitrary

¹⁰⁶ "Emigration to British Honduras," *Journal of the Society of the Arts* 7, no. 314 (November 1858), 24–25. A short-lived scheme was set up in 1863, see Phillip W. Magness, "The British Honduras Colony: Black Emigrationist Support for Colonization in the Lincoln Presidency," *Slavery & Abolition* 34, no. 1 (2003), 39–60.

¹⁰⁷ Donald Simmons, *A Study of the Efforts of Confederate Exiles to Establish settlements in British Honduras, 1861-1870* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Publishers, 2001).

¹⁰⁸ Lieutenant Governor to Governor of Jamaica, April 16, 186, Burdon, *Archives*, 3: 286.

¹⁰⁹ *DeBow's Review* 6, no. 3 (March 1869), 257.

¹¹⁰ *Journal of the Society of Arts* 5, no. 217 (January 1857), 113.

¹¹¹ Superintendent to Governor of Jamaica, Report on the Blue book of Settlement of the year 1858, June 22, 1859, Burdon, *Archives*, 3: 214.

¹¹² Petition, March 7, 1861, Burdon, *Archives*, 3: 234–36.

¹¹³ Bolland, *Formation*, 140.

¹¹⁴ John Burdon, "Historical Note," in Burdon, *Archives*, 1: 4.

¹¹⁵ Frederick Rogers's report, February 8, 1860, TNA, CO 123/103; Gibbs, *British Honduras*, 109–113; Burdon, *Archives*, 3: 80–83 and 3: 115–17.

¹¹⁶ British Honduras Grand Court Records, January 11, 1848, Latin American Library at Tulane, folder 1.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

exercise of judicial authority.¹¹⁷ His commission was revoked in 1861.¹¹⁸ By this time, Temple had been attempting to extend British jurisdiction over Belize and its population for eighteen years. He moved to the Indian Ocean, where he became Master of the Supreme Court at Mauritius until his death in 1866.

International tensions and geopolitics continued to affect the border once Belize had become a colony. After the French-led invasion of Mexico (1861–7), Maximilian was declared emperor and claimed all of Mexico, including Yucatán and parts of Belize.¹¹⁹ Meanwhile, Icaiche Indians claimed portions of Belize and confronted refugees over rent money. They launched raids against refugee settlements and logging camps, including Qualm Hill in 1866–7, where they took a dozen men, women, and children hostage.¹²⁰ They defeated a military force mostly made up of soldiers of African descent from Jamaica.¹²¹ In retaliation, more than 300 British troops marched into the Yalbac Hills and destroyed Maya villages.¹²² Eight to ten refugees “with traitorous intent” were accused of conspiring with the rebels and deported.¹²³ The authorities tried, often futilely, to implement an arms trade freeze after this series of incidents on the border.¹²⁴ Administrators passed regulations forbidding Indians to carry guns without a license and to reside, occupy, or cultivate lands without paying rent to the Crown or landowners, making economic independence impossible.¹²⁵ With access to colonial status, the government now had more military support to control its population.

Refugees continued to shape Belize’s political trajectory. In order to extend its control in the north, where most of the refugees lived, the government set up a circuit court in the Northern District. Clashes became frequent between landowners and merchants in the Legislative Assembly. The merchants in the town of Belize were reluctant to contribute toward border protection, whereas the landowners felt that they should not be required to pay taxes if they were going to receive inadequate protection.¹²⁶ In a stalemate, members of the Legislative Assembly asked for the establishment of direct British rule. The Legislative Assembly dissolved itself and Belize became a Crown colony in 1871 with a new legislative council. Three of its four members represented large landowners.¹²⁷

The following year, Icaiche troops led by Marcus Canul crossed the Hondo River and attacked the town of Orange Walk.¹²⁸ Fears flared up and the authorities arrested people on the grounds of suspicion.¹²⁹ Although open warfare declined after the late 1870s, Yucatecans were now increasingly regarded as suspect. The image of refugees as criminals became more and more entrenched. This general distrust of refugees extended to white Yucatecans who were charged with treason.¹³⁰

¹¹⁷ “The public of Honduras and Colonel Fancourt,” *Simmonds’s Colonial Magazine* 14 (May 1848), 91.

¹¹⁸ *Honduras Gazette*, October 19, 1861, 13.

¹¹⁹ Gibbs, *British Honduras*, 142–43.

¹²⁰ Bristowe and Wright, *Handbook*, 27–28.

¹²¹ Gibbs, *British Honduras*, 134–38.

¹²² Gibbs, *British Honduras*, 134–38.

¹²³ Lieutenant Governor to Governor of Jamaica, August 14, 1866, 272, in Burdon, *Archives*, 3: 272

¹²⁴ “Proclama de su magestad la Reina. Que observen y respeten la dicha neutralidad para con Yucatán,” *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Yucatán. El Constitucional* 403, May 8, 1861; British Honduras Company, “On the Means of Defence for the British Honduras,” September 20, 1864, TNA, CO 123/118.

¹²⁵ Regulations, in Memorandum by Lieutenant Governor, February 28, 1867, Burdon, *Archives*, 3: 283.

¹²⁶ Burdon, *Archives*, 3: 273.

¹²⁷ Bolland, *Colonialism*, 95.

¹²⁸ Don E. Dumond, “Independent Maya of the Late Nineteenth Century,” in *Anthropology and History in Yucatán*, ed. Grant Jones (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 114–15.

¹²⁹ Dutt locates a peak of arrests between 1871 and 1873 followed by a steady decline, “Loyal Subjects at Empire’s Edge: Hispanics in the Vision of a Belizean Colonial Nation, 1882-1898,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 99, no. 1 (2019), 53–54.

¹³⁰ Cunin and Hoffman, “From Colonial Domination,” 39.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The refugee crisis in the wake of the Caste War took place in a volatile context. Improvisation shaped colonial developments. At first, the Caste War was a way to create an image of Belize as a beacon of law, order, and compassion amidst a sea of chaos in Central America. The superintendent of Belize recognized this opportunity when he wrote, "Surrounded by republics in a state of dissolution where all evils of tyranny and anarchy subsist simultaneously, British Honduras has ... appeared ... as an experiment to see what can be made of the Spanish Americas."¹³¹ The label of refugee provided an opportunity to showcase British liberal and humanitarian values and also to formally join the empire. The influx of Yucatecans increased both agricultural production and military expenses, prompting wealthy white Belizeans to support the administration in seeking full support and direct rule from the empire.

As Belize transitioned from settlement to colony, the discourse around protection became a way to control and exploit the refugees. Although officials recognized their economic contribution, they marginalized them politically and economically, turning a valuable work force into a disenfranchised class to facilitate the extraction of resources. As a paternalistic enterprise, the extension of imperial protection to Yucatecans served to make them simultaneously insiders and outsiders. As refugees, they became subject to British jurisdiction but, as non-white refugees, they became excluded from landownership rights and political representation. The language of protection was both inclusive and exclusive, creating a binary relationship between the protector and the protected. Belize's attitude and policy towards Yucatecan refugees were shaped by clashes with Maya rebels in the late- 1860s and early 1870s but also mirrored what was happening in other places. By the close of the century, the British commitment to providing refuge became more limited as concerns for financial costs and diplomatic relations grew. Authorities and legal theorists began to question whether refuge was a moral obligation and whether everyone was entitled to claim protection from the state. Many advocated for a distinction between honest refugees and violent criminals, leading to the Extradition Act in 1870 and the Aliens Act in 1905, which restricted the right to asylum and introduced the notion of "undesirable immigrants."¹³² This was part of a global trend to legislate for immigration restriction.

Most Anglophone jurisdictions—Australia, New Zealand, and Canada—adopted race-based immigration restrictions. Belize deviated slightly from this larger context. Officials remained committed to the notion of refuge and never officially passed immigration restrictions. While they further restricted the rights of Maya residents, they reached out to prospective migrants in the United States, including African Americans but especially white Southern Confederates, to further agricultural development, increase the number of white and Anglophone settlers, and support the administration against Caste War Maya.¹³³ They concentrated their efforts towards a race-based control of those inside their borders. From initially protecting Yucatecan refugees, Belizean officials were now protecting the colony's resources from them.

¹³¹ Superintendent to Governor of Jamaica, July 16, 1857, TNA, FO 39/3.

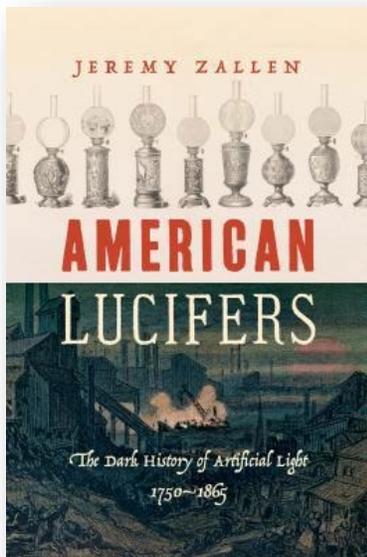
¹³² Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace*, 205–35; Alison Bashford, and Jane McAdam, "The Right to Asylum: Britain's 1905 Aliens Act and the Evolution of Refugee Law," *Law and History Review* 32, no. 2 (2014): 309–50.

¹³³ Bolland, *Colonialism*, 91; Simmons, *Confederate Settlements*, 94–96; Eleanor Harrison-Buck, Brett A. Houk, Adam R. Kaeding, and Brooke Bonorden, "The Strange Bedfellows of Northern Belize: British Colonialists, Confederate Dreamers, Creole Loggers, and the Caste War Maya of the Late Nineteenth Century," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 23 (2019): 172–203.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

BOOK REVIEWS



American Lucifers: The Dark History of Artificial Light 1750-1865.

Jeremy Zallen

Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019.

ISBN No. 9781469653327.

276pp. + Index, Notes, Bibliography. Illus.

[American Lucifers | Jeremy Zallen | University of North Carolina Press \(uncpress.org\)](https://www.uncpress.org/)

Review by Shelby Shapiro, first published online 8 May 2023.

Jeremy Zallen has written a political economy—a labor history—of pre-electric artificial lighting, basically going from candles to kerosene (and beyond). This is less a history of changing technologies and more an unveiling of the toils and troubles encountered and involved in the production of different forms of light, starting with tallow candles, whale oil, turpentine, coal gas and oil, lard oil, sulphur matches, and kerosene. He takes each of these energy forms and examines their production and distribution, including the products necessary for using them, as well as the side effects for producers and, to a lesser extent, consumers, from

boats to barrel staves, match frames to miner's lamps. The greatest strength of this book lies in its granular description of these processes. Suffice it to say that I have not been able to look at a candle in the same way I did before. Zallen's writing often borders on the lyrical – even where his conclusions are questionable.

Form follows failure, not function. This path for design was described by Henry Petroski, an historian of engineering, in the titles of one of his many books: *To Engineer Is Human: The Role of Failure in Successful Design* (1994). So too with artificial lighting: Zallen points out in great detail the injuries sustained by those



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

extracting, refining and using various lighting commodities or systems. These dangers would be succeeded by dangers of a different character as new forms of lighting became available. Zallen notes that different forms of artificial lighting coexisted: "Gas was the unquestioned light of an industrially enlightened future. All over the United States, from New York, Boston and Philadelphia to New Orleans, Baltimore and even whale-crazed New Bedford, gasworks were sprouting up, expanding, and thriving in cities still overwhelmingly illuminated with camphene, oil and candles." (p. 97) Success – however defined – was neither linear nor inevitable.

Zallen pays attention to the diversity of the work force: by gender, age, race, skill. One of the more interesting sections deals with Black whalers, including one Absalom Boston, who captained an all-Black crew. The heavy involvement of Quakers in the fisheries helped to protect runaways from slave-catchers. This kind of attention about who was doing what is another strong aspect of this book.

For all its virtues, this book does present problems. In the Prologue, Zallen warns readers:

"We should resist conflating relations of oppression: enslavement was not the same as marriage as keeping animals captive was not the same as child labor. But we should also resist enshrining a hierarchy of what-was-worse-and-better without thinking about how all these struggles related to and constituted one another. So long as we allow ourselves to think that being free was 'better' than being enslaved, that living human was 'better' than being an animal, that leisure was 'better' than labor, all we're really saying is that power was better than weakness, which is perilously close to saying that the powerful were better than the weak. It may be counterintuitive, but if we can't to learn how to be truly free, we'll find far wiser

teachers among those who lived as livestock than among those who lived as farmers, as children rather than adults, as colonized rather than colonizers, as unfree rather than free." (p. 9)

The problem is that Zallen is doing exactly what he warns us against. I know of no slave who held that liberation from slavery (i.e., that being free was "better" than being enslaved) came "perilously close to saying that the powerful were better than the weak." If we reject, for example, the proposition "that being free was 'better' than being enslaved," why did he even bother relating stories of slaves in revolt? And we may take a further step: why bother revolting? "Perilously close to saying" implies a logical connection. How many former slaves enslaved or sought to enslave their former masters?

Notably, Zallen nowhere defines "power." He appears to be making power synonymous with domination and coercion. But "power" can mean much more than domination, including the ability to effect changes, without coercion; exercising agency; allocating necessary resources, etc.⁴⁵⁰

Zallen writes that "(t)he future of American light from the viewpoint of 1860 appeared inextricably tied to an expansion of industrial enslavement, sweated outwork, and child labor." (emp. added) (p. 7) Technologies, of course, do not exercise agency. Would or could "industrial enslavement, sweated outwork, and child labor" have increased without changing technologies of artificial lighting? Would or could these forms of exploitation have existed or increased without the invention and improvement of the wheel? And was labor exploitation the intention of the inventors of various forms of artificial lighting or the wheel? To what extent were these evils the unintended consequences of actions taken for other purposes?

In writing about the production of lard and lard oil,

⁴⁵⁰ See, e.g., Giddens, Anthony, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, pp. 88, 91-94; Elias, Norbert, *What Is Sociology?* NY: Columbia University

Press, 1970, 1978, pp. 74, 92; Sahlins, Marshall, *Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, pp. 143-147



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Zallen states that

“looked at from another perspective, farmers and drovers were merely the overseers of the real work of making pork and lard, which was done by the hogs themselves. It might be counterintuitive, but to see the full range of the human geography of pork and candles requires first centering hogs in the story as actors”. (p. 138)

After relating the story of a farmer who dressed a sow with a bear skin, Zallen wrote that

“(t)he consolidation of hog trails around corn and feedlots was, to be sure, largely a process of geography and market relations. But it was also the result of insurgent marginal farmers, resistant hogs, and bearskin-clad terrorist sows.” (p. 153)

“Bearskin-clad terrorist sows”? While no doubt the sow scared the “resistant hogs,” Zallen’s referring to the sow as a “terrorist” imparts a particular intentionality on the part of the sow herself.

Reading the account of the march to death in the pigpen archipelago (p. 139), I recalled a class discussion in the 1990s following an assigned reading of *The Jungle* (1906), written by the Socialist muckraker Upton Sinclair to expose the evils of capitalism. Its depiction of meatpacking plants led to the Pure Food and Drugs Act, and Sinclair’s subsequent complaint in 1908 that “I aimed at the public’s heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach.” As the professor went around the class asking for each student’s reaction, predictably there were a number who declared themselves to henceforth becoming vegetarians. One student said, “I ate my hot dog, and then I cried!”

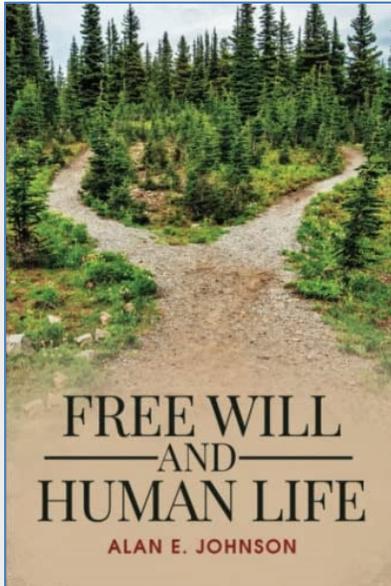
One of the few instances of humor in the book was the reproduction of a *Vanity Fair* engraving from April 1861, “Grand Ball Given by the Whales in Honor of the Discovery of Oil Wells in Pennsylvania.” It depicts a large number of whales in party dress—gowns and tuxedos, toasting each other with glasses and bottles. In the background are several banners, including “We Wail No More” and “Oils Well That Ends Well.” (p. 243).

This is a complex book. The depth, width and amount of research done by Jeremy Zallen was incredible, and should serve as an example for others. Though not without its problems, this reviewer would recommend it, both for the answers it gives and the questions it raises.

Shelby Shapiro (Ph.D. American Studies) served for many years as the English-language editor of *Tsum punkt/To the Point*, the magazine of Yiddish of Greater Washington, as well as for its predecessor publication, and was Associate Editor of *Records of the State of Connecticut* 2012-2021. His Ph.D. dissertation dealt with acculturation and American Jewish women in the Yiddish press; he is a Yiddish-English translator, and his research interests include Jazz and Blues (having presented jazz radio programs for nine years), the labor movement, the First World War, and immigrant anarchism.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



Free Will and Human Life

Alan E. Johnson

Philosophia Publications (28 July 2021)

Paperback: 160 pages

ISBN-10 : 0970105533

ISBN-13 : 978-0970105530

[Free Will and Human Life: Amazon.co.uk: Johnson, Alan E.: 9780970105530: Books](https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0970105533)

Review by Gary Herstein, first published online 24 July 2023.

This book attempts to address a predicament the author found himself in, how to teach Ethics without first establishing a baseline of knowledge regarding arguments for or against the reality of free will. Many an excellent book has emerged from just this kind of predicament, and this tidy little volume can now be added to that list. Full disclosure before going on: I was already predisposed to agree with the author's argument before encountering this book, and I make no pretense of adopting a mythological position of "pure objectivity." One of the things I like about the book is that the author is the same way: honest up front about his inclinations, and still willing to present the best arguments he can find against his position, and then confronting those arguments with solid reasons.

A note here on reviewer's license: The book really did excite me a bit, so I will use this opportunity to occasionally wander off on tangents that I find especially interesting, but which were in turn inspired

by reading Johnson's volume. This is not purely "look-at-me-ism." Rather I want to argue by demonstration that this is one of the better ways of reading this monograph.

The book is short – a little over 150 pages, including the index. But its goal is highly focused, and hence greater exposition would not only fail to serve, it would get in the way. As mentioned above, the purpose of this volume was originally to act as an auxiliary on the topic of free will so as to provide students in Ethics classes a leg up on the implicit assumptions guiding many of the arguments in that (nominally) primary topic. But what began as an auxiliary has emerged as a stand-alone introduction to a complex and important philosophical topic. In addition, this *is* an introduction, and not an in depth exposition directed at experts in the discipline; it is more a 'field guide,' if you will, for those who want to touch on the subject at enough detail to get a sense of the issues, one which then provides sufficient



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

directions for those who wish to explore further on some of the ways they might choose to proceed.

There are three main chapters to the book, plus an introduction where the main problem and central definitions and concepts are presented. Of these latter, the most important is the definition of free will:

“Free will” is the independent ability to make conscious decisions that are neither predetermined nor random. [FW, 3]⁴⁵¹

Johnson then sets out clarifying how each of the key terms – specifically, “independent,” “conscious,” and “predetermined” – are to be understood. This is a solid methodology; philosophy should never read like a mystery or a thriller, with a surprise reveal at the end. One thing I would add here, were I teaching from this book, is that definitions should not be treated as rigid, chiseled in stone, *ex cathedra* declarations of “The Law.” Rather, they should be viewed as heuristic guidelines to inform and direct *inquiry*, not as finalities in their own right, but as important stepping stones in an ongoing process. This is not a criticism of the book which, as already noted, by its own declared heuristic principles is kept as brief as possible. Rather, it is a reflection of my own philosophy and pedagogical principles which, for example, John Dewey would argue are essentially the same thing.⁴⁵² It is, I would argue, a strength of this monograph that it allows of that kind of interpolation of style and interpretation. In addition, Johnson himself later reminds the reader, “not to fall into the semantic trap of thinking that all definitions of free will are the same” [FW 42].

The three main chapters present arguments against free will (chapter one), arguments for the reality of free will (chapter two), and the author’s own position (chapter three), which is in many ways an extension and refinement of chapter two.

The three major branches of thought that deny the reality of free will are, as Johnson notes, religious, philosophical, and scientific. This is also a temporal order, within the western tradition, and is suggestive that, in a sense, each later argument emerges from the former. It is not quite that simple, as Johnson’s discussion shows. But, again, as important as the answers suggested are the questions invited.

Right here, I would once again a philosophical observation of my own. Philosophical analyses tend to emphasize, and take their clues from, one of two ways of approaching matters: by emphasizing existence, or by emphasizing experience. Among my own thoughts and questions, invited by FW, it seems that the tendency to deny the reality of free will is most common among those strands that emphasize existence, while those who advocate for its reality are most likely to start with experience. Keep in mind here that experience is our only access to existence. So when those who emphasize existence say things that deny the reality of experience, or some significant part thereof, there are defensible reasons for challenging the presuppositions of such challenges.

Argument in the western tradition against the reality of free will all seem to begin with the Christian legacy; I, at least, am aware of no such arguments in either the ancient Greeks, nor in the Hebrew traditions. Johnson highlights Paul’s letter to the Romans as an originating point for the reality of a predetermined “elect” [FW 7], and then turns to examine in detail the enduring contributions of Augustine [FW 8, ff]. Several other religious figures are considered, but always it comes back to the same thing: an omniscient, omnipotent God is in control of, and has preordained all that occurs. This is not a very satisfying argument for anyone who sets their highest stakes upon rational justification.⁴⁵³ But it sets the stage for the idea that human choice is of no particular relevance in either the grand or the lesser scheme of things, a truly novel idea

⁴⁵¹ I will use intext notes, abbreviating the book as “FW” throughout. One caveat about pagination, I am working from the Kindle edition, and experience suggests that the page numbers as listed are a little more approximate than with an actual piece of dead tree in one’s hands.

⁴⁵² See John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1916.

⁴⁵³ It is, in fact, a form of what is known as “fideism,” in which reason is more or less explicitly rejected in favor of pure faith and belief.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

within the western canon.

Philosophical positions all emerge directly from the religious ones, but they begin to redirect the emphasis. Thus (quoting Leo Strauss) Johnson notes in agreement that,

Hobbes' personal attitude toward positive religion was at all times the same: religion must serve the State [FW 12].

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) position, bridging the English civil war (1642–1646) and the Restoration (1660) make him an especially important figure in the philosophical shift from purely religious arguments, and those rooted in more secular views of the world, and so Johnson devotes several pages to his arguments.

The segue into science technically begins with Newton, but is brought forcefully into public discussion by Pierre Laplace a century later. The story goes that, when Napoleon asked Laplace why he included no mention of "God" in his works, Laplace replied, "I had no need of that hypothesis."⁴⁵⁴ Laplace's commitment to the secular and the mathematical was absolute, and the result was his argument for absolute, mechanical determinism: a sufficiently great intelligence could, by knowing the exact state of the universe at any moment in the past, calculate the exact state of the universe at any point in the future [FW 18 – 19].

One of the more prominent agents in the argument against free will is the contemporary British philosopher Ted Honderich. Professor Honderich is quite well known among academic philosophers, and is an important contributor to these debates, and thus a good terminal point for Johnson's discussion. Honderich takes the case for a fairly strong form of universal determinism, the questions of randomness brought up by quantum physics being treated as not especially important. (As Johnson observes, and his own definition of free will stipulates, randomness does not open the door for free will, since it eliminates any reasoned connection with choice as certainly as does

absolute determinism.)⁴⁵⁵ Prior to going deeper into the details of Honderich's argument, Johnson makes the following, and I would argue crucial, observation:

As with so many (pre)determinist opponents of free will, (Honderich) attempts to place the burden of proof on the advocates of free will, notwithstanding the fact that a belief in some kind of free will is consistent with human experience whereas a belief in (pre)determinism with regard to human choices and decisions is counter-intuitive. [FW 20]

This, again, brings us up against the distinction I broached earlier for those whose arguments are biased (in some manner) toward existence, versus those whose arguments begin with experience. As stated, I am overwhelmingly inclined to the latter position and am, as the saying goes, prepared to "die on that hill." I don't believe a coherent case can be made for the contrary, and hence Johnson's clear statement of the issue above and throughout is one of the parts of this book that I wish to emphasize.

Other thinkers, some of them neuroscientists presenting empirical results – and their *interpretations* of those results – are then discussed, but the flavor of the argument against can already be seen in all of them. These arguments generally follow, and suffer from, one of two patterns "The old-fashioned determinism involved predeterminism and inevitability. The new determinism is ad hoc" [FW 39].

Even though I've only skimmed through little more than the first 25% of the book, this seems like a good point to tie things up. The arguments in favor of free will are every bit as careful and well distributed across the philosophical spectrum. Hopefully the above suffices to indicate not only the care with which Johnson develops his argument, not only its direction (which is quite explicit), but also some sense of the potential avenues that readers can explore and develop on their own.

The great American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce

⁴⁵⁴ This incident is not mentioned in the book, but it is so famous and iconic that I thought it worth mentioning here.

⁴⁵⁵ I might add that Ernst Cassirer made this observation in his *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics*, Yale University Press, 1956.



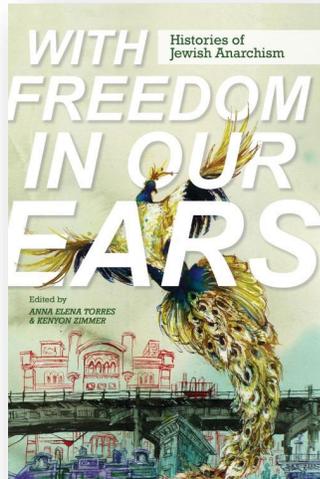
This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

argued that the worst, most singular vice in any intellectual activity is to close off the road of inquiry. So, in contrast, the greatest cardinal virtue is to point to doors opening upon that road that one had not seen before. Johnson's book is one that invites the reader to investigate further.

Gary Herstein spent 25 years in the computer and networked PC industries, and after obtaining graduate degrees taught full-time and part time at various colleges. He is currently working on various projects relating to the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, the logical forms and presuppositions of measurement, and the connections between spatial reasoning and metaphysics. His publications include The Quantum of Explanation (with Randall Auxier), Routledge Studies in American Thought, (2017), Whitehead and the Measurement Problem of Cosmology, through ontos-verlag (May 2006), "Alfred North Whitehead" (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/w/whitehed.htm>) and "Davidson and the Impossibility of Psychophysical Laws" (Synthese 145 1, 2005). He presently keeps house with his two cats, who despair of him ever learning anything interesting.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



With Freedom in Our Ears: Histories of Jewish Anarchism

Anna Elena Torres & Kenyon Zimmer (eds.)

Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2023.

ISBN 9780252087141.

260pp. with Notes, Index, contributor biographies.

[UI Press](https://ui.press.uillinois.edu/) | [Edited by Anna Elena Torres and Kenyon Zimmer](https://ui.press.uillinois.edu/) | [With Freedom in Our Ears \(uillinois.edu\)](https://ui.press.uillinois.edu/)

Review by Shelby Shapiro, first published online 24 July 2023.

Anna Elena Torres and Kenyon Zimmer have, in the short space of 260 pages, filled in many empty spaces in the historiography of Jewish anarchism. In a sense, they are picking up where the late Paul Avrich left off. He authored ten books plus many papers before his death in 2006 at age 74. At roughly the same time, new books on the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) were appearing, among them Robert L. Tyler's *Rebels in the Woods* (1967) and Melvyn Dubofsky's *We Shall Be All* (1969)..

Right now, with books by Anna Elena Torres, Kenyon Zimmer, Peter Cole, and South African sociologist Lucien van der Walt, we are witnessing a resurgence of academic interest in anarchism and the history of the IWW. *With Freedom in Our Ears: Histories of Jewish Anarchism* is a welcome addition to this gathering. The editors bookend these papers with introductory and conclusory essays. The first – “Freedom’s Fullness: An Introduction to Jewish Anarchism” – notes how, especially with the popularity of Irving Howe’s *World of Our Fathers* (1976), the history of Jewish Anarchism was at best ignored, at worst erased. This reviewer’s only quibble with this essay concerns the accuracy of the

“self-identified” Anarchist status of Noam Chomsky (considering his defense of Holocaust denier Robert Faurisson and his downplaying of genocide in Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge). Samuel Hayim Brody’s “Jewish Anarchist Temporalities” deals with different senses of time as represented by three German-Jewish intellectual-activists, Erich Mühsam, Gustav Landauer and Martin Buber; this is the most abstract essay in the book.

Two papers deal with Tsarist Russia. In “The Debate on Expropriations in Early Twentieth-Century Russian Anarchism,” Inna Shtakser examines how Anarchists approached the practice of expropriations for the Cause in Tsarist Russia, an issue of major interest along with questions about the role of violence. When were such actions justified, if at all? Ania Aizman’s fascinating “In the Jewish Tower: Prison Stories by a Forgotten Anarchist” concerns the writings of an anarchist in Tsarist Russia, Srul-Moishe Gershevich Braverman (1888-1937), who as Soviet memoir writer Semyon Sibirakov (“Semyon the Siberian”) wrote about pre-Revolutionary Russian Jewish life and as the survivor of Tsarist repression. His work discussed both political and non-political prisoners. His work appeared with



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

other Russian writers who were experimenting with new forms of writing. One experiment, "factography" bears a remarkable resemblance to what John Dos Passos did with his *USA* trilogy (1930-1936), inserting what Dos Passos called "newsreels" in the midst of fictional text. In 1937, this survivor of the white Tsarist Terror perished during the red Stalinist Terror.

Russian revolutionary outbreaks predating that of the Bolsheviks are the subject of Renny Hahamovitch's "The Storm of Revolution: The *Fraye arbeter shtime* Reports on the Russian Revolution of 1905." Hahamovitch discusses the intersections of Russian revolutionary activities with internationalism and senses of Jewish ethnicity in a highly nuanced manner.

Tom Goyen's "Johann Most and Yiddish Anarchism, 1897-1906" discusses the German Anarchist as an early inspiration for the immigrant anarchist movement, especially among German and Jewish activists. Elaine Ledeer's "Jewish American Anarchist Women, 1920-1950: The Politics of Sexuality," breaks new ground by looking at the topic in terms of gender, based on interviews with eight women, plus materials concerning the ILGWU activist (and later officer) Rose Pesotta. Ledeer points out the diversity of opinions, origins and activities. Unfortunately, from the historian's viewpoint, she chose the option of using pseudonyms for her interview subjects. There is thus no way of assessing the accuracy of memory, not that any of their statements were inherently improbable.

Mark Greuter authored one of the strongest and most interesting chapters, "Jews and North American Anarcho-Syndicalism: The Jewish Leadership of the Union of Russian Workers." The URW consisted of workers from the Tsarist Empire – Russians, Slavs, Jews – employed in the garment trades, on the docks, in construction, meatpacking and coal mines, to name but a few industries. They, along with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, or "Wobblies") and the Socialist Party were targets of the Palmer Raids after World War I. Greuter discusses Jewish immigrants who were among the URW's leaders. Bill Shatov, also extremely active in the IWW, would later disappear in Stalin's purges after being deported. Another leading Jewish intellectual, Vsevelod Mikhailovich Eikhenbaum, better known as Voline, would later lead the Nabat

("Alarm") Federation in the Ukraine, connected with the Anarchist groups led by Nestor Makhno. During the Civil War in the Ukraine following the Russian Revolution, Makhno's armed anarchist detachments fought alongside the Red Army, then led by Leon Trotsky. Greuter provides a fascinating sidelight on Voline and Trotsky:

"In 1940, looking back on his time in the United States, Voline recalled a remarkable conversation he had had with fellow Russian Jewish radical Leon Trotsky in New York, in the immediate aftermath of the February Revolution. (Trotsky had moved to New York City in early January 1917 expecting to lead the Russian socialist movement in the United States.) At the printer's shop where they both awaited their respective newspapers to come off the press, Voline told Trotsky that he expected the Bolsheviks would take power in Russia and persecute the anarchists. 'You will begin to persecute us just as soon as your power has been consolidated,' said Voline. 'And you will end by having us shot down like partridges.'

"'Nonsense,' replied Trotsky. It was nonsense to think Marxists would resolve their differences 'by turning their guns on the anarchists.'

"'What do you take us for?' cried Trotsky. He tried to alleviate Voline's concern by stating that Marxists were, after all, 'anarchists, in the final analysis. The only thing is that you want to introduce your anarchism straight away, without transition or preparation.' Trotsky dismissed this distinction as 'a little question of methodology, quite secondary.' Two and a half years later, after Voline was arrested by the Red Army in December 1919, his captors asked Trotsky, by telegram, what should be done with the anarchist, and Trotsky wrote back: 'Shoot out of hand.'" (pp. 124-135).

It was only through the intervention of novelist-activist Victor Serge that Voline's life was spared. This reviewer considers the only significant difference between Trotsky and Stalin – both falsifiers of history – to be that Trotsky was a much better writer. Voline went on to



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

write *The Unknown Revolution* (1947), chronicling the Makhnovist movement, its alliance with, and betrayal by, the Red Army under the command of Leon Trotsky. This chapter of *With Freedom in Our Ears* fills a huge historical void since precious little has been written about the URW, including the fact that its members were multiethnic, "Russian" only by virtue of the country from whence they emigrated. The URW had thousands of adherents. This paper fills voids in Anarchist, ethnic and labor history. This single chapter alone would justify buying the book.

Yiddish press historian Ayelet Brinn contributed a very interesting paper, "Translation, Politics, Pragmatism, and the American Yiddish Press." She examined the reasons for, and strategies around, translations appearing in Yiddish periodicals. The role of the Yiddish press in general, and the Anarchist press in particular, in the project of educating immigrants about world literature. She begins her piece with the controversy around William McKinley's assassination in 1901 and its coverage in the Yiddish anarchist paper, *Fraye arbeter shtime* (Free Voice of Labor). The *Fraye arbeter shtime*, published from 1890 to 1977, makes multiple appearances in this volume.

Binyamin Hunyadi's paper, "Political Satire in the Yiddish Anarchist Press, 1890-1918," looked at the work of three writers: Morris Winchevsky, Dovid Edelshtat and Dovid Apotheker. Best-known as the "sweatshop poet," Winchevsky, a socialist, penned political satire as "*Der meshugener filosoף*" [The Crazy Philosopher]. Dovid Apotheker wrote as "*Der hinkediker shlimazl*" [the Limping Good-for-Nothing], making fun of all radicals, socialists and anarchists as well. In between Winchevsky and Apotheker was Dovid Edelshtadt. Edelshtadt, who edited the *Fraye arbeter shtime*, died of tuberculosis in Denver, where he sought treatment, at age 26. Best known as a revolutionary poet, Hunyadi discusses Edelshtadt's attempts at political satire. The other two writers were more successful in the genre.

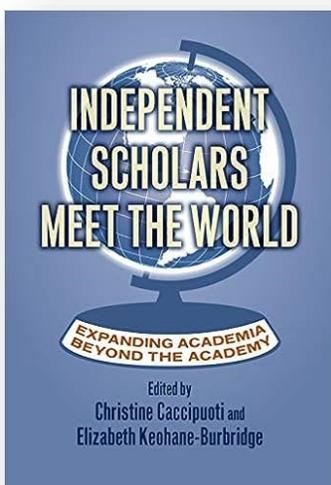
Allan Antliff breaks new ground with "Divine Fire: Alfred Stieglitz's Anarchism." Stieglitz is best-known for his photography, his role in establishing photography as an art form, his publications and galleries. His paper takes issue with fellow art historian Tara Kohn who sought to cram Stieglitz into a fashionable "whiteness" frame, making of this internationalist a spokesman for nationalism. For those of us aware of Stieglitz in relation to photography, much of this will come as totally new. Antliff points out that among those in Stieglitz's milieu were Emma Goldman and Hippolyte Havel. Antliff likewise notes that 291 – the famous Stieglitz gallery – was less a marketplace for art than for ideas: here artists could be themselves, expressing themselves in whatever creative directions they chose. Just as Stieglitz's anarchist sympathies will surprise those who know him for his photography and his efforts to establish it as an art form, we learn in the editors' Conclusion that "(o)ne of the most notable Jewish anarchist painters was Camille Pissarro, whose curator calls him 'the only impressionist with a big police file.'" (p. 234). For those of us who identified him with Impressionism and its progeny, or as a mentor to Mary Cassat and Gaughin, this too comes as a surprise.

This book is an intellectual buffet, a smorgasbord of different dishes. This review has only hinted at the pleasures awaiting the reader. Feast and enjoy!

Shelby Shapiro (Ph.D. American Studies) served for many years as the English-language editor of *Tsum punkt/To the Point*, the magazine of Yiddish of Greater Washington, as well as for its predecessor publication, and was Associate Editor of *Records of the State of Connecticut* 2012-2021. His Ph.D. dissertation dealt with acculturation and American Jewish women in the Yiddish press; he is a Yiddish-English translator, and his research interests include Jazz and Blues (having presented jazz radio programs for nine years), the labor movement, the First World War, and immigrant anarchism.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



Independent Scholars Meet the World

Christine Caccipuoti & Elizabeth Keohane-Burbridge (eds.)

University Press of Kansas, 2020

Paperback: 227 pages + index

ISBN: 9780700629916

[Independent Scholars Meet the World: Expanding Academia beyond the Academy \(Rethinking Careers, Rethinking Academia\) : Christine Caccipuoti \(editor\) & Elizabeth Keohane-Burbridge \(editor\): Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)

Review by Amanda Haste, first published online 2 August 2023.

This book first crossed my radar when I was asked to provide an endorsement for the cover, which I was pleased to do. This volume comprises a collection of essays that not only provide personal accounts of contributors' journeys towards independent scholarship but also "urges scholars of all sorts to reconsider what truly divides – and unites – us in our work" (p.vii).

As editors Christine Caccipuoti and Elizabeth Keohane-Burbridge discuss in their Introduction, the term 'independent scholar' (IS) has been variously defined, for instance as "those who did not have an advanced degree but who had become a specialist on their own" (p.3) or those with an advanced degree "who – by choice or necessity – specialize in a topic that fits within an academic field and yet work outside of the tenure-track professoriate" (p.4). The authors confined their choice of contributors to North American scholars who "have advanced degrees in their fields but have not entered the tenure track (for any reason) and who are currently working in a role that is not traditionally academic but is still related to the field for which they attended graduate school" (p.5).

Although the authors had imagined an inclusive

diversity of race, creed, gender identity and sexual orientation, despite their best efforts this volume is dominated by cis men and (predominantly) cis women, and the authors draw two conclusions for this. Firstly, that more women are likely to be ISs, the strictures of parenting and other caring roles being among the possible reasons, and secondly, that male ISs "are fewer in number and may not be as comfortable in taking on this stigma" (p.7). Indeed, "more than one [male IS] we solicited declined in part because they felt that academia would be retaliatory if they described their experiences" (ibid.).

The Introduction contains a brief overview of the history of academic tenure in the USA, and the adjunctification of academic labor, which has consigned vast numbers of PhDs to juggling insecure temporary contracts, often for many years. Indeed, the NCIS definition of 'independent scholar' includes adjunct faculty, and it noticeable how many of the contributors have been subjected to the 'gig economy' throughout their careers. The authors also discuss the concept of 'Alt-Ac' for Alternative Academia, and their preferred term – 'Expanded-Academia' – within which the eleven contributors "are happily using the skills they learned in their graduate studies in their new



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

careers” and “are doing it on their own terms” (p.19). Following an illuminating (and entertaining) foreword by Ben Raphael Sher, the volume is divided into three parts. In Part 1: Independent on Campus, classicist Alison Innes relates the issues of pursuing her research passion while coping with a disability, and revisits the important question of the loss of her traditional academic identity. Medieval historian Joshua Hevert openly discusses his ambition to teach at university level, and the pressures on himself and his marriage of his secondary teaching post, while still feeling “emotionally attached” to his research (p.71).

In Part 2: Leaving the Ivory Tower, four essays examine their authors’ transitions from academia to pastures new: medieval history to museum education; medieval studies to primary school art instructor/archaeologist; history to making history podcasts; art history to managing community-based projects. In ‘*Footnoting History for the Public*’ Caccipuoti and Keohane-Burbridge’s details their respective journeys towards their successful history podcasting platform *Footnoting History*⁴⁵⁶ which has “allowed us to maintain our scholarly presence, expand our areas of expertise, hone our business skills, and educate the public” (pp.134-5).

In Part 3: Family Life and Scholarship, we encounter three essays from (you guessed) mothers who have juggled their parenting responsibilities with their intellectual life. Danielle Slaughter left college teaching and founded the Mamademics website in 2012 to chronicle her life “as an academic and first-time mother” (p.162), and relates the sense of community of “finding other Black women in the academy” in similar situations to her own (p.167) which led to her role as an influencer through her Mamademics Academy.⁴⁵⁷ In ‘Burn it Down: From Adjunct to University Staff to Stay-at-Home Mum to Beauty School’ Katherine Anderson Howell explains how she has published books and poetry while coping with her own disabilities and bringing up two children with special needs. In ‘Being a Full-Time Parent and a Part-Time Scholar’ historian Valerie Schutte relates how she chose to be a part-time

scholar while staying home with her son and has published regularly. She says “I have no regrets” as “I spend every day with my son, focus on my own publications, and only work on projects that I find meaningful” (p.200).

In the final Part 4: From the University to Freedom, neuroscientist Vay Cao’s chapter on ‘Freeing the PhD – Solving an Identity Crisis’ asks “Am I still a scientist? Defining what it means to be an Independent Scholar” and addresses the challenges facing ‘wet lab’ scientists when they lose access to “the fancy equipment, animal facilities, expensive reagents, and institutional credentials assumed necessary to add new knowledge to [their] field” (pp.220-21). She runs an independent enterprise called Free the PhD which supports those transitioning out of academia.⁴⁵⁸

Overall, this volume provides fascinating insights into the challenges facing independent scholars, and the ingenuity and fortitude with which they have faced not only issues with accessing resources, but also mental health issues (often caused by the pressures of trying to maintain their place within academia), coping with disability, and balancing their relationships and family commitments with their scholarship.

Of the themes that pervade this book, I would like to draw out just three: affiliation, self-identity, and transferable skills. Affiliation is something that concerns many ISs, especially when conferences, journals and organizations often demand that we ally ourselves to a known academic institution. As Valerie Schutte says (p.198);

It is not terribly hard to get a university affiliation if you are an independent scholar. The easiest way is to simply affiliate yourself with the institution that granted your PhD. You can still claim them as your home school, without getting any support from them in return.

However, she has chosen (as has this reviewer) “not to affiliate myself with a university, without having an active role at that university” and is living proof that lack of a university affiliation need not hold one back:

⁴⁵⁶ <https://www.footnotinghistory.com/>

⁴⁵⁷ <http://mamademics.com;>

[https://mamademicsacademy.com/.](https://mamademicsacademy.com/)

⁴⁵⁸ <https://www.freethephd.com/>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

"I know that I do not get asked to give guest lectures because I am not affiliated with a university. I am not a 'prestigious' scholar to be called upon to give lectures or even interviews when a new movie related to queenship or early modern English history comes out." [However] "I am proud that I work from home, largely on my own, and that I have achieved as much as I have" (p.199).

This reviewer would add that the only answer to this conundrum is to be the scholar that writes the book (!). As a paid-up member of NCIS I have always given my affiliation as 'Independent Scholar' and/or 'National Coalition of Independent Scholars' and this has always been accepted and never (to my knowledge) held me back.

In terms of scholar identity, Ben Raphael Sher realized that he had internalized the "independent scholar stigma" [...] "effectively and painfully" outlined in these essays, but that the contributors to this book "correct that stigma and erasure by persuasively insisting that we have not left academia and our identities as scholars, but expanded them" (p.xix). Ultimately, "leaving traditional academia does not necessarily mean divesting yourself of your identity as a scholar" (ibid). Indeed, our reputations as scholars should be based on the quality of our research, not on a putative affiliation with a university with which we have had no recent contact and which does not support our research.

These essays demonstrate time and again that the skills we acquire as scholars have proved invaluable in the twists and turns of the authors' post-graduate-school careers. Sher realized, on embarking on a career in the film industry, that:

Graduate school had taught me how to balance ten different projects/jobs at once, how to take concepts and present them in a fun and accessible way ... and how to critically analyze films and TV shows" (p.xvi).

As Allyson Schettino says:

"Look past the information you've learnt in the pursuit of your degree(s), and think about the skills you've acquired. Each and every one is attractive to a future employer and is increasingly rare in a world where the vast majority of undergrads are pursuing career-track degrees. The world will always need people with a liberal arts skill set. You have value!" (p.81).

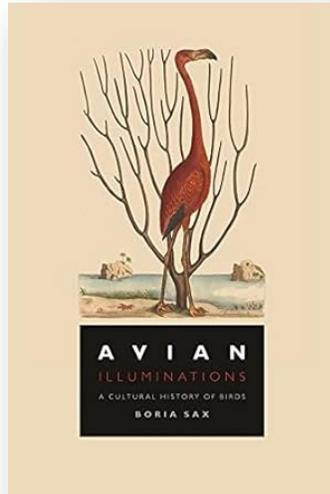
While I have heard mutterings about the dearth of referencing in this volume, based on this second reading I would venture to suggest that the endnotes and bibliography are sufficient. The narratives of these essays may be intensely (and at times painfully) personal, but they provide an insightful analysis of the issues facing independent scholars, and the myriad solutions that are possible if we only care to look further within ourselves.

In short, these eleven honest, pragmatic accounts of scholars creating and maintaining their own academic profile will surely inspire and guide others. This volume demonstrates that *independent* does not mean *inferior* and that high-quality scholarship can indeed be pursued outside the confines of academe.

Amanda Haste is an Anglo-French musicologist and freelance academic translator whose research interests include identity construction through music and language. An independent scholar since 2010, she was adjunct faculty in the Music Dept. and Applied Languages Dept. at Aix-Marseille University, France from 2015 until her retirement in 2023. Her research has been published in leading journals and books by major editors and she authored (with James E. Block) *Constructing Identity in an Age of Globalization (Paris: Ex Modio, 2015)*. Her monograph *Music and Identity in Twenty-First-Century Monasticism* was published by Routledge in October 2023, and (with Linda Baines) she is currently working on the NCIS Guide for Independent Scholars, scheduled for publication online in December 2023.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



Avian Illuminations: A Cultural History of Birds

Boria Sax

ISBN 978 1-78914-432-1

474pp. + Endnotes, Further Reading, General Index, Index of Birds, Websites about Birds. Illus., b&w, color.

[Avian Illuminations: A Cultural History of Birds: Amazon.co.uk: Boria Sax: 9781789144321: Books](https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/9781789144321)

Review by Shelby Shapiro, first published online 9 October 2023.

Boria Sax continues his efforts to examine the links between and among animals and humans in his latest book, *Avian Illuminations: A Cultural History of Birds*. In the Introduction he writes that his intent is “to show how intimately our bonds with birds are bound up in the matrix of ideas, practices, fear and hopes that make up what we call ‘human civilization.’” (p. 14) Sax draws upon biology, history, philosophy, folklore, art and religion to achieve this goal, which crosses not only disciplines but territorial borders: this is a worldwide study.

The book is divided into four parts: Birds in Philosophy and Religion; Birds in History; Birds and Art; and Birds and the Future. He writes not so much about birds, but about what birds have meant to their human observers, worshipers and those fearing birds. The illustrations, as in all his books, are exemplary, covering everything from Old Masters to the menu of a Washington, D. C. eatery of the 1940s, the Chicken Hut, to cartoons and cave paintings.

Sax does not limit his examination to what Westerners agree are “real” birds; he includes birds outside the Western canon, for example the deities of Northwestern Native American cultures and Asian civilizations. Throughout he probes what various birds mean, and why, and how these various beliefs fit into comprehensive worldviews.

He writes that “(h)unting birds such as partridges, grouse and pheasants has long been a highly ritualized sport of the British upper classes, analogous to fox hunting.” (p. 343). Sax notes that “(w)hen aristocratic hunters faced a lack of game birds, gamekeepers in Britain began stocking the countryside with millions of pheasants.” (p. 346).

In *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant*, historian Jonathan P. Spiro notes how big game hunters belonging to the Boone & Crockett Club ended up becoming the backbone of American conservation movements seeking to replenish what they enjoyed hunting.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Hermann Goering followed the same strategy at his hunting lodge, Carinhall. Sax discusses the 1973 Nobel Prize-winner and Nazi theorist of animal behavior, Konrad Lorenz (pp. 179-180); for more on Lorenz, see Sax's *Animals in the Third Reich: Pets, Scapegoats, and the Holocaust* (2000). In *Avian Illuminations*, it is clear that the white lab coat of Konrad Lorenz merely covered his political brown shirt.

Among myriad topics, Sax discusses cockfighting, "which became popular in Greece long before chickens and eggs became a dietary staple." (p. 207). He writes that

"(t)he bloody spectacle of cockfighting displays a primal, indiscriminate fury that may be a driving force in all civilizations yet which none can fully acknowledge."

Sax goes on to discuss Fred Hawley, a student of cockfighting in the United States, and anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who studied the same phenomenon in Bali. Sax states that

"(i)n other places, however, cockfighting has become a way to sublimate, rather than act out, impulses towards interpersonal violence. Traditional cockfights are well-behaved at matches from Bali to Mexico and the United States. Cockfights in these locales are conducted according to strict rules, and the judgements of the free are seldom questioned." (p. 209)

This observation would be in accord with Norbert Elias's theories of the "civilizing process," especially as it concerns sports, as set forth in his introduction to *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986), as he traced the development of rules which would level the playing field, decrease personal violence and continue a sport's

particular excitement, whether falconry, cockfighting, rugby, soccer or fox-hunting.

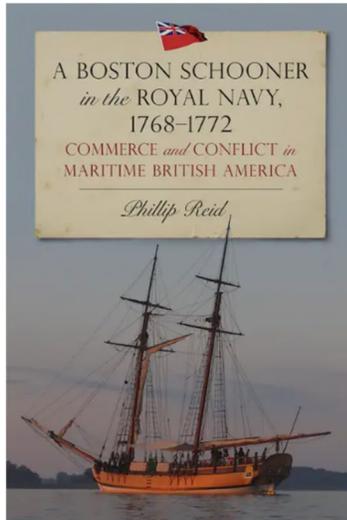
Throughout the book are illustrations by the nineteenth-century caricaturist J. J. Grandville, who utilized birds in his anthropomorphic sketches and drawings to make political points; unfortunately, we do not learn more about this artist of the Romantic Era.

As is usually the case with works by Boria Sax, by the time we finish the book, we no longer take its subject for granted: he opens our eyes to see in new and unexpected ways. This, even though there can sometimes be much that is speculative (as indicated by qualifiers such as "might" and "could"). Yet even in such instances, the reader is prompted to question and reconsider what is taken for granted. As is the case with all of Sax's prior books published by Reaktion Books Ltd., the quality of the text and its many illustrations (whether black and white or color), are stellar, a tribute to his choices and the publisher's production standards. This is another volume to be placed on your "to get" list.

Shelby Shapiro (Ph.D. American Studies) served for many years as the English-language editor of *Tsum punkt/To the Point, the magazine of Yiddish of Greater Washington*, as well as for its predecessor publication, and was Associate Editor of *Records of the State of Connecticut 2012-2021*. His Ph.D. dissertation dealt with acculturation and American Jewish women in the Yiddish press; he is a Yiddish-English translator, and his research interests include Jazz and Blues (having presented jazz radio programs for nine years), the labor movement, the First World War, and immigrant anarchism.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



A Boston Schooner in the Royal Navy, 1768- 1772: Commerce and Conflict in Maritime British America

Phillip Reid

Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2023

287 Pages

ISBN: 978 17832 7 746 9

<https://boydellandbrewer.com/9781783277469/a-boston-schooner-in-the-royal-navy-1768-1772/>

Review by Stanley Carpenter, first published online 16 October 2023.

Phillip Reid, an independent scholar specializing in maritime history has put his academic accomplishments to good use in *A Boston Schooner in the Royal Navy, 1768-1772: Commerce and Conflict in Maritime British America*. A graduate of the highly regarded program in maritime history and nautical archaeology at East Carolina University (MA, 1998), he focuses on Atlantic World history, maritime history, and nautical technology, especially British Atlantic merchant ships of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Accordingly, he is well-suited to produce a history of His Majesty's Schooner *Sultana*. Originally built as a trading vessel, she was commissioned into the Royal Navy (RN), reconfigured, and served on the North American customs and anti-smuggling patrol from 1768 to 1772 under the command of Philadelphia native Lieutenant John Inglis (retired as rear-admiral) and Master David Bruce.

Reid argues that considerable overlap existed in nautical technology and personnel between the merchant world and the military. Accordingly, that allowed the RN to purchase small merchant ships and convert them to anti-smuggling and customs patrol craft. Smuggling was rife in the 18th century in New England, especially Rhode Island and Narragansett Bay

where hundreds of protected inlets provided ready sanctuary. While larger warships such as frigates had difficulty navigating the inlets and bays, smaller vessels such as sloops and schooners proved ideal for customs enforcement. Such was the case of the Boston-built schooner *Sultana*. The ship's history provides a wealth of archival data on the nature of period civilian merchantmen and commissioned warships. *Sultana* is an excellent laboratory for analysis of the vessels that plied the British Atlantic and North American coastal trade just prior to the War of American Independence. *Sultana* thus "presents a rare opportunity to explore the intersection of naval and maritime history – of commerce and the conflict it generated – in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic" (xii). But the study of HMS *Sultana* provides a broader picture – that of the relationship of the North American trade, commercial, and shipping industry to the wider British mercantile economy. It highlights the technological aspects of period nautical science. And it provides an insight into how the use of such vessels illustrates the political and strategic aspects of British North American governance and trade relationships on the eve of the American War of Independence. Those features, besides the highly technical and engineering details, are the real value of this work.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The passage of several acts in the 1760s designed to raise revenue from the American colonial trade such as the American Revenue Act required increased enforcement of customs laws and tamping down smuggling. Accordingly, British officials were authorized to purchase civilian merchant ships for conversion to what might be called “revenue cutters” today. *Sultana*, built in Boston in 1766 by Benjamin Hallowell, Boston’s most prominent ship builder, was typical of those purchases. Sailing to England, she was fitted out as a warship at Deptford in 1768 that included mounting swivel guns. The commissioning of such small, formerly commercial vessels as revenue patrol craft reflected the difficult conditions following the Seven Years’ War (1763) where the RN experienced dramatic downsizing in personnel and warship hulls, all complicated by decreasing budgets (naval estimates). *Sultana* was a “work around” as a method of providing coastal patrol forces while minimizing the impact on global and imperial warship requirements. It was, as Reid highlights: “an expedient that sprang from a post-war combination of new and unprecedented demands on the central government and the treasury, a maturing of the mostly autonomous British American maritime commerce economy, and the political instability of George III’s early reign” (142). He notes that *Sultana* was not a traditional naval vessel. As a conversion from merchantman to warship, she was “of necessity, improvisational technology serving improvisational policy” (143). In short, the Crown use of such non-traditional vessels represented a shortage of regular warships needed to enforce the new revenue and commercial regulatory policies.

The balance of the book highlights the ship’s journeys to and from America and service in the Chesapeake and Narragansett Bays and Delaware River before decommissioning in 1772. The work expresses Reid’s true love – maritime and nautical technology. Therein lies a potential trap for any author should they delve too deeply into the ins and outs of a highly technical subject. Fortunately, he has made the technology and details of period ship construction and sailing easily understandable to the general reader. He provides an excellent glossary. The one criticism is that the work would benefit from drawings and diagrams to illustrate the technological aspects visually. Modern readers are

increasingly visually oriented; good diagrams and figures would enhance the readers’ understanding of the Age of Sail’s complex technology.

Of equal value is the analysis of period RN dynamics. He addresses in depth: the technology and methodology of sailing small vessels on open ocean and inland waterways; navigation in the pre-Industrial Age; eighteenth-century naval discipline; procedures for revenue, customs, and anti-smuggling operations; and life in the RN, including desertion, impressment, discipline, personnel relations, and rank hierarchy.

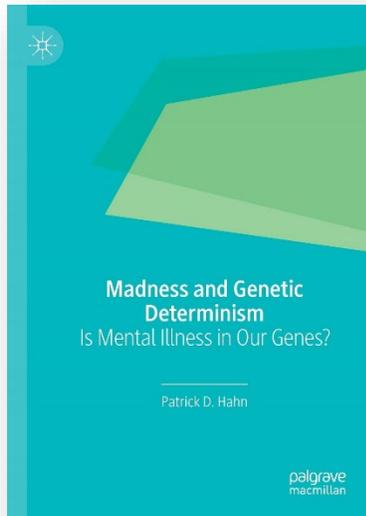
Despite her limitations in size, speed, and weaponry, overall, *Sultana* succeeded in her mission. Yet, that factor proved ironic. Mission success only further aggravated colonial resentment of the new revenue and commercial policies. That anger sometimes led to outright open defiance as illustrated by the *Gaspee* Affair in June 1772 in Narragansett Bay. Another example was the sugar trade from the West Indies. Reid highlights that 75 per cent of the cargo intercepted was sugar products, a fact that no doubt agitated the New England rum distilling concerns!

As an historical scholarly work, the book is very solid. The primary sources are excellent ranging from the Admiralty Papers in the British National Archives to the commander’s notes and the master’s logbook. Lieutenant Inglis and Master Bruce kept copious notes, all of which give authority and authenticity to Reid’s analysis of the technical and day to day activities of the doughty little warship conducting a hazardous and unpopular mission. It is most highly recommended for naval historians, those looking at the dynamics and context of the American Revolutionary period, and the general reader fascinated by the Age of Sail.

Stanley D.M. Carpenter (Ph.D. *British Military History*) served as the Strategy and Policy Division Head for the College of Distance Education at the United States Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, and was a Professor of Strategy and Policy. Professor Carpenter retired from the US Navy in June 2009 with the rank of Captain after thirty years’ service. He authored *Southern Gambit: Cornwallis and the British March to Yorktown* (U Oklahoma Press, 2019) and was co-author of *The War of American Independence, 1763-1783: Falling Dominoes* (Routledge, 2023).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



Madness and genetic determinism: Is mental illness in our genes?

Patrick D. Hahn

New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019

193 pages

ISBN 978-3-030-21866-9

\$54.99 (paperback),

<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-21866-9>

Review by Kevin Hans Waitkuweit, first published online 27 November 2023.

Patrick Hahn's *Madness and Genetic Determinism* provides a compelling view of genetics in medicine through several historical and contemporary case studies. His argument outlines the connection between genetics and mental illness/differences: particularly schizophrenia. In a past review of Hahn's monograph, Colin Ross (2020)⁴⁵⁹ points to the book's value to readers interested in the intersection of genetics and schizophrenia.

Hahn explores the complicated connections between heredity and mental illness. Using schizophrenia as a case study, he outlines how the arguments for genetic and biological heredity of schizophrenia result in two potential outcomes: either multiple mental illnesses have genetic/biological origins, or another factor is the cause. To prove his point, Hahn provides a robust narrative of the socio-historical complexities that encompass the integration of genetics as a mainstay for psychiatric discussions of schizophrenia.

Through discussing the history of genetics *Madness and Genetic Determinism* does a wonderful job of incorporating the social elements that impact mental illnesses like schizophrenia such as the importance of social environmental factors to the formation of mental strains as well as the socio-historical factors of psychiatry that still inform the nature of how schizophrenia is viewed in contemporary psychiatric discourse.

Tracing early work on mental illness in American psychiatry to European researchers, Hahn intertwines the complex story of medicine with the individuals involved in particular case studies that came to inform psychiatric conceptualizations of schizophrenia. His argument throughout the monograph provides a much-needed critique to the absolutism of diagnostics and offers tools for readers to take a critical reflection on the complexities that exist around psychiatry and genetics as they relate to schizophrenia. In reading *Madness and Genetic Determinism* Hahn provides a

⁴⁵⁹ Colin A. Ross (2020) Madness and genetic determinism. Is mental illness in our genes?, *Psychosis*, 12:3, 300-301, DOI: 10.1080/17522439.2019.1700300



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

clear and valid critique of psychiatry through the socio-historical narrative of genetics as it is applied to schizophrenia. The holistic approach Hahn takes shows great care and offers a template for other scholars interested in researching the complexity of medical diagnostics.

Hahn's stance is one that would find some connections with the concerns voiced through the anti-psychiatry movement and provides an expansion to the works of scholars such as Thomas Szasz. Similar to Szasz, the work of *Madness and Genetic Determinism* is not a condemnation of psychiatric discussions around mental illness but a concern around the need to understand how social factors function within the diagnosis and employment of psychiatric means to address the needs of those with mental illness, like individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Hahn (2019) stresses the importance of the social applications of psychiatry, describing how:

"More than forty years ago, psychiatrist Thomas Szasz noted that in other branches of medicine, a diagnosis is an explanation for what has happened to a patient. In psychiatry, 'schizophrenia' and other diagnostic labels are a justification for doing something to a patient. That, too, has not changed" (p. 156).

The concern around diagnostic labels elucidates how a medical system can become intertwined with a patient's existence. The emphasis on social concern, is noted in the concluding paragraphs of Hahn's work, where Hahn (2019) asks psychiatry experts "[w]hat has the field of psychiatric genetics contributed to mankind?" (p.165). The responses offered a varied discussion of the complexities that exist and the problems that psychiatry has caused in the world today. These quotes, especially those related to the history of psychiatric genetics provide a coda to the historical undertakings of Hahn's monograph.

Madness and Genetic Determinism is in essence a historiography of the interconnectedness between genetics and mental illness. The work demonstrates the importance of understanding social and historical factors that influence the realities of diagnoses. From connecting the history of genetics in the United States with eugenics and Nazi views on mental illness, to the recognition of the highly personal nature that such medical diagnostics has on the individuals themselves, Hahn's work offers a prime example of how individualistic and social factors are interconnected in the ways in which mental illness is understood in contemporary US society.

Hahn's view is one that recognizes the ever-growing nature of genetics in discussions of diagnostics. Where Szasz famously contested the existence of mental illness throughout his career,⁴⁶⁰ Hahn provides a more nuanced approach. In concluding his treatise on schizophrenia and genetics, Hahn's focuses on the sobering reality that psychiatrics and genetics are complicatedly interconnected. His implications from his research emphasize the toll of psychiatry on those diagnosed with schizophrenia as well as the social impact of deterministic views in psychiatric treatment. Ultimately, any reader interested in learning more about the complicated relationship between genetics and schizophrenia would benefit greatly from reading *Madness and Genetic Determinism*. This text would be beneficial to readers and scholars interested in psychiatry, disability studies, medical anthropology, medical history, and medical sociology.

Kevin Hans Waitkuweit is a PhD student in the Department of Disability and Human Development whose research interests focus on the social impact of medical phenomena, with particular attention to meaning-making process. His forthcoming publications includes chapters in Research in Social Science and Disability and the NCIS Guide for Independent Scholars. kevinhw@ucla.edu

⁴⁶⁰ Benning T. B. (2016). No such thing as mental illness? Critical reflections on the major ideas and legacy of

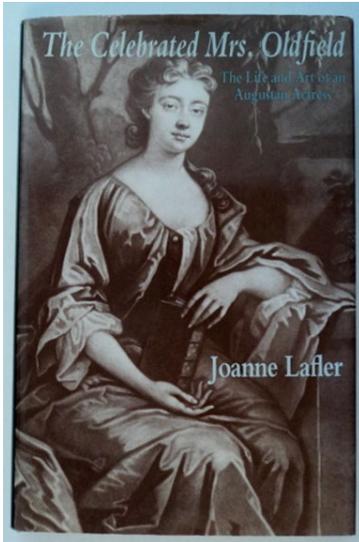
Thomas Szasz. *BJPsych bulletin*, 40(6), 292–295, DOI: 10.1192/pb.bp.115.053249



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

OBITUARY

Joanne Lafler (1934-2023)



We were very sorry to hear of the sudden death of Joanne Lafler (1934-2023), one of the founding mothers of NCIS, and our sincere condolences go to Joanne's husband John and her daughter Janet.

Joanne Lafler gained her doctorate in theater history from UC Berkeley in 1974 and became a renowned theater historian, later turning to California social and cultural history, 1900 to 1950. In 1998 she became an editor of H-Scholar, an H-Net discussion list sponsored by NCIS, which she helped found. She was also a founding member of The Institute for Historical Study (San Francisco Bay Area) in which she was still active: her most recent contribution was an article in the latest issue of the Institute for Historical Study newsletter (42, no. 3, winter 2023) in the form of a short article about Henry Lafler's friend Jack London: "What's in a Name? Jack London and Racism." Joanne is commemorated in a touching piece on H-Scholar by fellow founding mother Margaret DeLacy, which we have pleasure in reproducing here.

=====

Friends:

I am devastated to be sharing the news of the sudden death of my colleague, co-conspirator, and friend, Joanne Lafler, one of the founders of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars and a founding editor of H-Scholar.

Joanne, Georgia Wright and I met together at a conference called by the San Diego Independent Scholars in 1986. Joanne and Georgia were both members of the Institute for Historical Study in the San Francisco bay area. I came down from Portland, Oregon. A Chicago librarian, James Bennett, had been circulating a xeroxed newsletter among a handful of local independent scholars' groups, had announced that he was discontinuing it and the SDIS had decided to call a meeting to discuss ways to continue it.

At the conference, the three of us advocated not only for establishing a national newsletter but also – to the surprise of the others in the room – for creating a new national organization. We encountered a lot of skepticism about whether such an organization would ever prove viable. Nevertheless, Georgia agreed to edit the new newsletter, *The Independent Scholar*, and produced its maiden issue in 1987. Meanwhile, I developed a rough sketch for a new organization which we conceived as an umbrella organization, a "coalition" of the scholars' groups that met locally. The first elections took place in 1988. Joanne was elected to the founding board of the new National Coalition of Independent Scholars (NCIS) together with Barbara Bell, Gloria Erlich, Joy Frieman, Karen Smith, and Nancy Zumwalt. Barbara, who is still on the H-Scholar advisory board, offered to convene the first meeting of the new organization in New York in 1989. I ducked out on the grounds that I had young children at home and it was difficult to travel. My



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

third child was born that year.

At that meeting, Barbara was elected president and Joanne became the Secretary-treasurer. She became President herself in 1992, just 30 years ago, and for many years she also produced the NCIS members' directory. She was already a very active member of the Institute for Historical Study in the San Francisco Bay area and she also served as president for the IHS.

In 1996, we began to discuss an application to H-Net for our own network. At that time, email was still relatively new, many people were using dial-up services, and AOL was just gathering steam. After our application was approved, it opened for subscriptions as H-Scholar at the end of in 1997. Joanne, Barbara, and I were the founding editors together with Diane Calabrese who bravely became the first editor to complete the H-Net editorial training and post to the new list. Joanne continued as editor until she turned 80 in 2014 and then became an advisor and frequent contributor. Her final post to H-Scholar was published on January 3rd, 2023. As she often did, she complimented a post from a current editor, Sandra Ham.

Joanne and I met occasionally, especially when we served together on the NCIS board, but we corresponded much more frequently, often exchanging several emails a day. In addition to discussions about NCIS activities during the years when we were both serving on the board, we had many discussions about the internal policies of H-Scholar and our role within H-Net.

In the early years, H-Scholar required much more editorial intervention and judgement than it does now. The list editors received an email of the day's announcements and select just the ones that were relevant to their list. As the membership of H-Scholar crossed nearly every academic discipline, we usually published all the announcements on the list. In those days, H-Net was email only, so the H-Scholar archive may be the most comprehensive list of the early academic announcements that were "published" by H-Net online. However, questionable announcements often slid through to our in-box. These were either not of scholarly interest (such as a children's Easter Egg roll at an historic house) or were downright fraudulent, luring scholars to "conferences" that took place in someone's bedroom, or "journals" that would publish anything at all for a fee. When the acting editors came across these, or simply announcements that fell into a gray area, they would send a query to the other editors with the question "should I post this." A discussion would ensue about whether or not the announcement was likely to be of interest/use to working scholars. We rarely disagreed, but these discussions became an ongoing dialogue about what made a given project, conference, or event, truly scholarly. Joanne always had a definite opinion but I can't recall a single time when we failed to reach a constructive consensus. Equally important, I knew that whenever I contacted her, I could rely on her to respond constructively.

Joanne continued to pursue her own research interests throughout her life. She had a Ph.D. in Dramatic Art from the University of California at Berkeley and was an expert on the eighteenth-century stage. She wrote that she had not become an independent scholar by choice--she had enjoyed teaching and regretted the circumstances that made it impossible for her, like so many other well-qualified scholars in those years, to find permanent academic positions. She published one book, *The Celebrated Mrs. Oldfield: the Life and Art of an Augustan Actress*, and several articles on eighteenth-century actresses and the role of women in the early modern theater.

More recently, she has been researching the life of her husband's father, Henry Anderson Lafler, a member of the Bohemian Club, and a man at the center of the San Francisco literary community in the early twentieth century. Retracing a bicycle trip he took to the Northwest brought Joanne up to Portland for a very pleasant visit.

The most recent issue of the *Institute for Historical Study* newsletter (42, no. 3, winter 2023), includes a short article by Joanne about Henry Lafler's friend Jack London: "What's in a Name? Jack London and Racism." I wrote Joanne when it arrived that I was looking forward to reading it, which I finally did earlier this month – I am sorry that I will never be able now to tell her I enjoyed it.

Without Joanne's hard work and unfailing support for other independent scholars, you would not be reading this message today.