

Who Wouldn't Marry Jesus?

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They had him by the feet: Matthew's resurrection witnesses, the two scared Marys, one clutching the right ankle of Jesus, the other his left. They immobilized him for worship. But Jesus sent the ladies back to the brothers with a promise: "Go to Galilee. There they will see me." (Matt 28:9-10)

The promise that is "Galilee" is the prospect of figuring it all out at last. If the brothers and sisters could just get back to Galilee, they could see Jesus. They could finally understand who he was, what he said, what happened to him, and what it all meant. A religiously motivated quest anticipates the scholarly quest for the historical Jesus and accompanies it throughout all its waves and phases. Yet the Matthean promise entails a turn from cherished beliefs and assumptions to investigation. The moment of inquiry must have its own integrity. This is as close as we get, in the gospel tradition, to an endorsement of the scientific method.

Investigation is scientific when it gathers all available relevant data, formulates and tests hypotheses, and reaches conclusions through valid logical inferences. These are not separate steps in a linear progression. At the outset one is already using logical inference to stipulate what sort of phenomena will count as "data" during observation. "Going to the Galilee" of the late Hellenistic and early Roman period (about 198 BCE to 135 CE) is by no means a simple or straightforward task. To investigate with integrity, in a rigorous and honest manner, means keeping an eye on the

assumptions, hopes, and extraneous experiences that enter into the construction of the “data.”

Such factors are sometimes criticized as bias, but it is naive to suppose that they could ever be banished altogether. Just such naiveté was characteristic of archaeology in the mid-twentieth century, when the discipline aspired to emulate the methods and the rhetoric of the physical sciences, hoping to achieve the sort of inexorable objective certitude that they claimed.¹ This naive ambition has infected some historical projects that draw upon the findings reported by archaeologists of the Land of Israel. The emulation or simulation of scientific method can introduce bias of its own, if one neglects to think critically through certain issues. It's time to take stock of the status of the data that enter into recent appraisals of Greco-Roman Galilee. This essay begins by establishing a critical framework for assessment of archaeological reports. On that basis, we will go on to address several issues that have troubled recent historical studies of Galilee and its most famous son, Jesus of Nazareth.

1. HOW ARE DATA PRODUCED?

The little four-letter word “data” already confronts us with sobering philological and cultural complications. *Data* is Latin for “the givens.” German “es gibt” is equivalent to English “there is.” Both are singular statements. But “givens” are plural, discrete, distinguishable, countable. To be observed, this one and that one must first be recognized and set apart from the background unity of all that is; only then can we register their plurality and variety. The act of discerning “one of” something is an interpretive act. It requires comparison of an actual datum, here and now, with some ideal standard criterion for whatever kind this one is one of.

The ideal kinds can be rather simple or quite complicated. On the simple end of the spectrum, suppose that you are looking for water. You correctly observe that water is present when you feel

dampness, or when you use a scientific instrument capable of registering H₂O. In the latter case, you would be required to trust the instrument. Scientists do not personally calibrate and vouch for every piece of instrumentation. This phenomenon of conventional trust is called the “black box” phenomenon. Anonymous specialists, working somewhere else, are presumed to be vouching for the reliability of the output of the black box, whenever raw material is properly input to it. Routinely, investigators rely on black-box analyses and on absent experts.²

With our hypothetical water-detecting black box, the internal mechanism could be quite straightforward. Perhaps there is some chemical compound that changes only and always in the presence of water. Perhaps it swells or heats up. Suppose this change is known to be caused by interaction with water and by nothing else. This immediate causality is such that it cannot be interfered with by wishing, or believing, or arguing; it is known to be unaffected by the time of day, the geographical location, or the gender or ethnicity of the technician conducting the test. Suppose our hydro-sensor black box includes a simple mechanical device that causes a pen to move across a band of graph paper whenever the indicator compound undergoes the telltale change. For those who use such an instrument every day, the characteristic graph lines would stand in for water. They affirm that there is water here. They do so on the strength of a chain of physical reactions that is purely causal. So the presence of water counts as a fact, not a mere opinion.

Rocks on the surface of Mars recently have been found to display certain features that indicate water once was present there. Confidence is high that this is a fact, since the chemical and mechanical processes that shape rocks are well understood. Wishful thinking by NASA scientists cannot have produced the electronic images of those rocks, much less the contours and mineral inclusions of the rocks themselves.³ As on Mars, there are features of Earth that can be as they are

only as the result of certain physical processes. The upper Jordan River deposits silt at the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee, so the lakeshore slowly advances southward. Clay that is made into ceramic vessels retains the chemical composition of the patch of ground where it was dug. Given a pottery sherd and the right black box, you can tell where the pot was crafted. Given the present topology of the Kinneret lakeshore, the probable rate of silting, and the number of centuries since the founding of Bethsaida-Julias by the shore, you can confirm the location of the ancient town.⁴

It is in this sense that one speaks of “the archaeological record.” But the term “record” is a metaphor, and as Linda Patrik has astutely remarked, there are two different ways in which to construe the process through which past events were recorded in the earth. One way is the causal process just described, where the configuration of the earth is an effect of that which it is taken to record. In this case, the archaeological record indicates past events in much the same way that a black box detects the phenomena that it is designed to find. No human motivations enter into the configuration of such a “record.” By contrast, the other recording process is a deliberate initiative by someone to communicate something, so that the configuration observed in the earth is a symbol of something else. This symbolic record is an artifact: human motivation entered into the causal processes to fashion their configuration. The difference between the two recording processes is the difference between the accidental and the deliberate.⁵

In practice, any human habitation site exhibits both kinds of information, often in the same piece of material. The crucial distinction to make, while constituting excavated material as “data,” is to sort out those aspects that were *caused* by unchosen physical processes, from those that were *chosen* among alternative possibilities. Ceramic sherds illustrate this. Given a piece of an ancient pot, the unchosen or so-called natural components of its condition include the chemical composition of

the clay (indicating its source nearby or far away), the degree of calcification along the broken edges (indicating whether the break occurred centuries ago or during excavation), its placement in the earth above older material and beneath more recent material (provided that it was not found in a disturbed area such as a trash pit or a plowed field), and its proximity to other materials (such as an oven with remains of burned fuel, in a layer sealed by the collapse of a roof).

The accidental, inadvertent character of the association of potsherds with other items within a sealed locus is one of the most important principles of scientific inference in archaeology. Everything in such a sealed locus must have gone out of use at the same moment. In some cases, that moment can be identified by references in ancient texts, such as the destruction of the towns of Gamla and Yodefath during the Jewish War described by the historian Josephus in his books. Or perhaps a coin is found with the sherd, inscribed with a name or date. The coin's design obviously offers information that was laid down deliberately. Although the dropping of the coin was probably inadvertent, the minting of the coin was deliberate and was meant to communicate just those political assertions that can still be read off of it today.

The principle of dating through association is supported by the physical recording connection, in Patrik's terminology. Physical laws insure that coins and potsherds stay put in the earth where they are dropped, unless and until they are disturbed by physical processes like erosion or earthquakes, or until someone digs them up. But this principle is used in tandem with several other principles that, as it happens, are not so securely founded in brute inexorable forces like gravity. For example, archaeologists take it to be axiomatic that pottery styles are distinctive to the cultural group that manufactures them, and that the styles gradually change over time. But for these two axioms, there is no physical necessity. To be sure, potters are constrained by their materials and the function that

the pot is to accomplish. They use local clay, they form it to be concave enough to retain fluid, and they fire it to render the surface impenetrable. But optional decisions enter into the creation of pots at two levels. First, there is the decision to make a pot at all, and then to do so with a specific purpose in mind. Pots do not cause themselves automatically. Second, there is the decision how much effort to expend on inessential features like decoration or the curve of the lip or handle of the vessel, and how exactly to render those features most pleasing and attractive.

Tastes and skills tend to remain constant within cultural groups, changing very slowly over generations. This yields a principle of cultural conservatism in pot design, from which arises a black-box phenomenon in the construction of archaeological data. Accordingly, sherds that exhibit a certain material composition and aesthetic design may come to be associated with a distinct cultural group. Conversely, the existence of a group may be inferred from a cluster of distinctive potsherds. Or, the existence of two different cultural groups may be inferred from the fact that two different kinds of potsherds have been found. Or, venturing further out along the limb of inference, perhaps it is denied that there could have been any cultural (religious) differences among the inhabitants of a place since no variations in their potsherds have been found. Or, perhaps it is denied that habitation continued at a site where the sherds do not exhibit the expected stylistic changes. This result is reached through an invalid inference: styles *must always* evolve because they *can* evolve and *have* evolved.

How strong is the principle of cultural conservatism? At best, it is a rule of thumb: differences in pot design suggest differences of culture and/or of time. Ceramic forms somewhat resemble languages, gradually evolving. But in practice, this axiom functions rhetorically to expand the range of features that are attributed to the material recording function. In a kind of creeping

physicalism, this principle assigns to aesthetic choices about pot design the kind of certainty that rightly attaches only to physical laws of gravity, erosion, or genetic mutation. Taken to its absurd extreme, it yields a dictum that a potter cannot possibly make a pot in a style identical to that of his ancestors two centuries earlier, or in the style of his neighbor of different cultural background. The unlikely turns into the impossible.

It is crucial to keep in mind that archaeological findings are produced as inferences based on ambiguous and fragmentary physical finds. The direction of the inference matters, as when the existence (or, the absence) of a population is inferred from the features of potsherds and where they lay. The chains of inference that yield archaeological data, though long and complex, tend to contract in final reports, where they are presented in abbreviated form. For example, “black-box” phenomena are downplayed or excised so that “indicator sherds” simply stand for populations. In the background is the role of the expert examiners who classified the newly unearthed sherds as identical in style with other sherds of known date and culture. Classification of aesthetic forms involves nuanced discernment and interpretation, quite unlike the automatic registration of water or its lack by our hypothetical water detector or the confident reading of a watery past for Mars from photos of its sedimentary rock.

Axiomatic principles, black-box instrumentalities of detection, and reliance on authoritative experts all are factors that contribute to scientific investigations in many disciplines. They are called middle-range theories, because they mediate observation by standing between and connecting the physical materials and the articulated hypotheses in which historical knowledge of facts and forces is expressed. Science as we know it cannot do without them. The practice of objectivity merely requires that we keep in mind the formative function of the middle range theories in the production

of data.

By the same token, objectivity requires that we consider whether there may be other, unrecognized and unacknowledged middle-range theories at work in the construction of a particular data set. One glaring example is the cluster of assumptions related to gender and family. Western archaeologists are prone to project a nuclear patrilocal family structure onto the interpretation of housing designs excavated in Galilee. This assumption wrongly rules out, in advance, the possibility of finding evidence of the sort of cultural contact routinely expected and found by archaeologists working in other situations of conquest and cultural imperialism. For example, those who cook meals with indigenous foods might be local women, working for wages in a house where those who consume the meals are male conquerors newly arrived from elsewhere. In such a situation – which is not only theoretically possible but, based on textual evidence, rather likely for Galilee in the first centuries BCE and CE – the potsherds obviously cease to be infallible indicators of “the” cultural identity of such a household. It would be a mixed household with an internal gendered cultural frontier.⁶

2. WHOM DID THE HASMONEANS CONQUER?

The Judean Temple state, under Hasmonean administration, launched a military campaign to annex Samaria and Galilee. This conquest took place during the late second through the early first centuries BCE. The justification for it is found in 1 Maccabees 5:14-23: some Judeans who were resident in Galilee appealed to Jerusalem for help. Galilee is portrayed in the text as a kind of *irredenta*, that is, a region with a minority ethnic population that is oppressed by the majority population and therefore stands in need of rescue. From the perspective of the Judeans, the war of conquest is a restoration of the Land of Israel to dimensions resembling those of the Davidic empire

before the secession of the Northern Kingdom about 922 BCE.

Mordechai Aviam cites this passage in his discussion of the archaeological evidence of the Hasmonean conquest. If Galilee of the late second century BCE had a minority population who claimed ethnic affinity with the Judeans, where did they come from? The Israelite population of the Galilee had been deported in the eighth century by the Assyrians, “almost completely” as Aviam says.⁷ He surmises that a very few escaped deportation, and that those survivors “gradually concentrated in the western part of Lower Galilee.”⁸ By the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, people of non-Israelite culture had gradually moved from the coastal region eastward and southward into mostly abandoned areas of Galilee and slowly repopulated them. Another possibility, not explicitly mentioned by Aviam, is that some Judeans might have moved north into Galilee before Hasmonean times. Aviam cites additional biblical texts that presume continuity of a “Jewish” presence in a few towns in western lower Galilee after the eighth-century deportation. Yet he cautions that there are no Galilean sites for which excavators can securely establish habitation in the post-deportation era, that is, the seventh-sixth centuries BCE.

Aviam thus offers a very carefully nuanced presentation of the divergence of the archaeological record from the textual record. The biblical texts affirm that non-Judean Israelite people continued to inhabit a few villages in western lower Galilee after the Assyrian deportation of the eighth century. These were survivors of the ten northern tribes, the Kingdom of Israel, which had seceded from the Davidic empire after the death of Solomon. On the other hand, “no solid evidence” of them has been reported by archaeologists.

What would count as “solid evidence” of that non-Judean Israelite habitation in Galilee after the deportation, which the biblical texts presume (Judith 1:8, 2 Kings 21:19 and 2 Kings 23:36).⁹ The

answer is: distinctive potsherds. In other words, ceramics of similar material composition and evolving styles would be found in habitation layers both above and below a layer of burning and destruction from the Assyrian conquest, indicating continuity of habitation by people of Israelite culture. No such continuity of sherds before and after the deportation has yet been reported by archaeologists.

This lack of continuity pertains to larger towns, which tend to attract archaeological attention. The Galilean sites important enough to have been excavated stratigraphically separate rather neatly into two groups: those with sherds datable before the Assyrian deportation, and those with strata datable to the era of Hasmonean expansion.¹⁰ Strata datable as “Iron III” and “Persian” periods (733-586 and 586-322 BCE, respectively) are quite rare. For the larger towns, at least, it appears that pre-deportation sites were uninhabited afterwards, while post-deportation sites were founded in previously unoccupied locations.

This still does not prove that Galilee was empty of people, Israelite or otherwise, in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE. It merely suggests that the larger towns either were abandoned, or were inhabited in a manner that did not add any novel layers or artifacts to be excavated by us. A few people could have lived in or near the ruins, in the seventh century, making pots that still looked like pre-deportation pots. The material remains of those people would be indistinguishable from those of the century before.

But not everyone lived in a town of notable size. For tiny hamlets and farmsteads, there has been no stratigraphic excavation. The locations of many small localities mentioned in ancient texts are not even known today. There is another archaeological technique, besides stratigraphic excavation, for gathering data about habitation in areas of low population density. It is the surface

survey, a systematic collection of all potsherds and other artifacts that turn up on the surface of the ground across a wide area. By definition, the sherds collected are not associated with any stratum or datable level of habitation. They are associated only with a place (specifiable by latitude and longitude). Presumably they arrive at the surface of the ground by having been dropped there or by being exposed through erosion, or turned up through plowing or burrowing animals. The presence of a sherd or other artifact indicates only that human beings were once here, not *when* or *why* they were here, much less *who* they were.

But in combination with prior stratigraphic findings, the data of a surface survey can yield additional information. The principle of analogy functions as a middle range theory to permit this extrapolation. This principle states that two sherds of similar composition and design must be of similar age and origin. Thus, a ceramic sherd that turns up in a surface survey is compared to a reference collection of sherds whose ages and origins are already known through prior stratigraphic excavation and the principle of association. In other words, if a similar sherd was found elsewhere in a sealed locus together with a datable coin, then the new sherd acquires the date and origin of the reference sherd. Identification of sherds through comparison with reference sets is a skill practiced by experts with many years of field experience, and their prestige helps to secure the evidence of the new sherd.

Relying on the principle of analogy and his own expertise in making comparisons to reference sets, Zvi Gal conducted a surface survey of Lower Galilee and published his findings in a dissertation in 1992.¹¹ Gal covered more than 80 sites whose names are known, and his is the most comprehensive data set available for Galilee. He classified the sherds he found by comparing them with sherds whose origin and date already were established. Let us assume that Gal collected

carefully, and that a representative sample of all extant potsherds happened to rise to the surface of the ground where he could pick them up; this is the methodological premise of the surface survey, and it can be granted for the sake of the argument. Gal reported that he could date *almost none* of the sherds he found to the seventh or sixth century BCE. That literally means: no one *in* Galilee made pots that resembled pots made *outside* Galilee in the seventh and sixth century BCE. Gal's evidence is perfectly consistent with a scenario where people in Galilee, though reduced in number, still continued to make pots in the seventh and sixth centuries that resembled pots made in Galilee before the eighth-century deportation of their ancestors' neighbors.

Since, by conventional wisdom, there "is no" Israelite habitation in Galilee after the Assyrian conquest, there is no reference set of sherds identifying Israelite populations in seventh- and sixth-century Galilee. Therefore, no matter what Gal found, he could not have dated it to the seventh or sixth century, since there was no criterion for comparison. The argument is absolutely circular. It is built to conceal the perfectly plausible case in which the pottery signature for post-deportation Israelite Galileans was identical with that for pre-deportation Israelite Galileans. Thus, if Galilean Israelites made any pots in the seventh or sixth century, the sherds will be (mis)classified as eighth-century sherds, on the basis of the available reference set, which was assembled from pre-deportation sites.

Gal's findings are widely interpreted as evidence that Galilee was empty of population after the Assyrian deportation and remained so during the seventh and sixth centuries BCE. On this view, non-Israelite populations began to drift back in to the unoccupied land in the fifth and fourth centuries, so that by the time of the Hasmonean invasion in the late second century, the indigenous population of Galilee was gentile, with the exception of those few Judeans who might be found in

isolated pockets in western lower Galilee.

But that view cannot be supported. The evidence of Gal's surface survey is insufficient to rule out continuity of kinship and culture between the Israelite non-Judean population of Galilee before Assyrian deportation, and people in the third and second century BCE who could claim to be their descendants. Granted, the Hasmoneans encountered plenty of non-Israelite people and places when they invaded Galilee. Whether these “gentiles” were absolutely avoided by the indigenous non-Judean Israelite Galileans, whether they had some trade contacts among their respective villages, whether they occasionally intermarried and, if so, what the effects were for their experiences of ethnic and religious identity – these are issues that cannot be addressed on the basis of presently available archaeological evidence. Aviam found that some of the people whom the Hasmoneans conquered were using a plain utilitarian kind of storage jar, made of what Aviam called Galilean Coarse Ware or GCW. At a few sites, sherds of GCW were found near figurines, suggesting that such jars and their contents were acquired a households that sheltered individuals of non-Israelite or laxly Israelite religious sensibilities. GCW in itself is not “pagan.”¹²

In the absence of decisive evidence, what can account for the tenacity of the thesis that Galilee remained unpopulated in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE? This thesis is ideological and serves – today as it did 22 centuries ago – to justify the Hasmonean imperial program of restoration of ancestral territories, with Judeans standing in for the supposedly long-vanished Galilean Israelites. It projects a neat binary opposition – gentiles versus Jews (Judeans) – by erasing any inconvenient indigenous people who were non-Judean, non-gentile, and too poor to care much about rituals, tithes, baths, betrothals, or cooking kosher with their GCW. One can then imagine that the Hasmoneans either slew all the gentile pagans, forcibly converted them, or drove them out of Galilee, clearing the

way for the flourishing of a “pure Jewish” population in the first centuries BCE and CE.¹³

The thesis of a “pure Jewish/Judean” Galilee by the time of Jesus and Hillel is so tempting to Christian and Jewish scholars alike, that Zvi Gal's dissertation is cited widely and uncritically as expert testimony confirming its main premise, the vanishing of Galilee's indigenous Israelite population. For example, Jonathan L. Reed extrapolates well beyond Gal's evidence, “essentially ruling out any direct continuity between the Northern Israelites and the first-century Galileans.”¹⁴ Reed's overstatements go undetected, and he in turn is widely cited as the expert witness whose word guarantees the historicity of the claim that the only Israelite people in the Galilee of Jesus were the Judean versions recently imported by the Hasmoneans.¹⁵

Not evidence but ideology has foreclosed scholarly discussion of possible variant indigenous Israelite sentiments and practices in the Galilee of Jesus. The issues are important ones: how welcome were the Hasmonean administrators and landlords; how widespread was allegiance to the Jerusalem Temple; how important were the observances of caste, tithing, and purity regulations? Exactly whom did the Hasmoneans conquer, displace, employ, and tax? Did the in-migrating Judeans execute and banish the previous occupants of Galilee, or did they indenture and employ them, or could they intermarry with them?

These issues would play out intergenerationally for over a century, with each successive generation encountering slightly altered terms of contact. In the wake of the conquering forces, the Hasmoneans established administrative outposts at strategic locations in the Galilee and the Golan. Judeans moved north to staff those outposts. Southern families settled in Galilee and the Golan to develop farms, olive orchards, wineries, and other industries such as weaving and fish-packing. The benevolence of this takeover must not be assumed.

3. WHAT DOES JEWISH LOOK LIKE?

Jewish ethnicity and religious sensibility are difficult to define, even today among living people. Jewishness in the past is identified through judgments based on criteria, and those criteria are open to question. When archaeologists assert that an artifact, a building, or a city is “Jewish,” they mean that recognized indicators of Jewishness have been identified. Early reports from one of the excavators of Sepphoris, a Greco-Roman city in Galilee, insisted that this was “a Jewish city” in the first century CE and specified two indicators as criteria of Jewishness: the presence of stepped pools in domestic contexts, and the placement of tombs outside the city walls.¹⁶ In a 1994 article, I pointed to the rhetorical character of *miqva'ot*. These stepped pools do not simply indicate Jewishness as if they were caused effects of it. Rather, they assert a degree of concern about a particular version of Judaism and they enter into the contested construction of it.¹⁷ The implication is that “Jewishness” itself is not an inert fact but a cultural achievement that must constantly be renewed.

Students of Meyers responded to this challenge. One branded my critique anti-Semitic.¹⁸ Reed carefully expanded the list of archaeological indicators of “Jewishness” to four, yet confined himself to things without addressing the manner in which the things accomplish the indicating. His list of Jewish indicators includes: cups or jars carved from stone; stepped pools (*miqva'ot*); implements for secondary burial, such as ossuaries or loculi tombs; and bone profiles that lack pork.¹⁹ Implicitly there is sometimes a fifth indicator: decoration when present is aniconic, without human and animal figures.

An indicator, strictly speaking, must be present whenever what it indicates is present, and only then. Furthermore, the indicator must be causally produced; and the arrow of causality must go

from the indicated entity to the indicator, not the other way around. In this case, “Jewishness” would have to be causing the production of stone vessels, *miqva'ot*, distinctive burial architecture, and pig-less bone assemblages; and this must invariably happen whenever “Jewishness” is present. Reed tries hard to make his data meet this standard, often by overgeneralizing or extrapolating beyond the data. Two examples must suffice. Reed asserts that Nazareth exhibits “the same pattern in religious indicators,”²⁰ presumably including bone profiles that lack pork, although he earlier noted that no bone profile had been reported for Nazareth.²¹ In another example, Reed states that the supposedly “Jewish” town of Capernaum lacks the indicator of a *miqveh*, but he attributes this lack to the relative poverty of the town and the nearness of the Sea of Galilee to accommodate ritual bathing.²² Thus it appears that *miqva'ot* are at best an indicator of wealthy urban landlocked Herodian-era Jewishness, not of Jewishness as such.

Two of the Meyers-Reed indicators, *miqva'ot* and the architecture for secondary burial, when found in Galilee are best interpreted as cultural markers of expatriate Judeans. These forms originated in Judea, where they are well represented, and they first appear in Galilee with the coming of the Hasmonean administration. In addition, they require the expenditure of considerable wealth. Nor do these forms persist in the archeological record much after the first century CE; even the *miqva'ot* are soon filled or converted to other uses. This architecture, together with the innovation of the synagogue building itself, serves to assert Judean cultural identity in a context where it is contested.

The two other indicators, stone cups and pig-free bone assemblages, are suggestive but ultimately admit of alternative interpretations. Aversion to pork is attested in ancient Egypt and may be a cultural preference of West Asian peoples, in contrast to those of Mediterranean ancestral stock.

Small stone cups should be distinguished from large stone storage jars. The latter are quite expensive to make: a heavy block is quarried, transported to a shop, and turned on a lathe. The interior of the jar must be laboriously hollowed out. Stone jars indicate wealth, as do the domestic *miqva'ot* and the secondary burial implements, including ossuaries carved from stone. But a small stone cup with a handle can be carved without a lathe. More research is needed into the possible motivation for this design. Aviam, who also accepts “stone vessels” as indicators of a Jewish population, found that only a handful of sites yielded both stone vessels and ossuaries.²³

4. WHERE AND WHEN ARE THE EDGES OF JUDAISM?

We come now to a question exhaustively discussed by Shaye Cohen in relation to the textual record, though not the archaeological one.²⁴ Today’s English word “Jewish” connotes both a religious and an ethnic identity. Both are shaped by many factors, including the early experiences and texts of the people of Israel as well as historical experiences in medieval and modern Europe. The word “Jewish” inexactly translates *Ioudaios*, following linguistic usage in Hellenistic literature that in turn reflects the Judean hegemony achieved by the Hasmonean conquest of all Israel. Strictly speaking, the term “Jewish” is anacronistic when applied to the first centuries BCE and CE. In that era there are Judeans, some of whom live in Galilee. Quite likely, there are also Galileans of Israelite heritage and practice who do not identify as Judeans. Outside of the Land of Israel, “Judean” can signify anyone who honors the religious heritage of Israel or observes some of its practices, such as taking the weekend off.

“Being Jewish” is not a physical fact in the first centuries. It is a project, a rhetorical achievement that must be constantly negotiated. This is owing in part to the kinship- and caste-based character of Israelite identity. Maintenance of a lineage requires marriage to brides of similar lineage

for the sons in each generation. Lineage, in turn, is not a readily observable quality. It too must be rhetorically constructed, even when times are good. In times of adversity, violence, economic hardship, war, political unrest – or, after an *irredenta* is forcibly annexed – auxiliary instrumentalities are called upon to strengthen kinship claims. Identity is secured into the past through visible elaborate practices of entombment. Identity is secured into the future through visible architectures of separation and definition: the synagogues, the *miqva'ot*, and the young people who are trained up in their proper use.²⁵

I have argued that several important features of Judaism, as we know it, arise as resistive cultural responses to the material culture imposed on the Land of Israel by the Roman occupation.²⁶ For example, the separate water systems of *miqveh* architecture respond symbolically to the secularization of urban water in Jerusalem by Roman-style aqueduct design. Reed and J.D. Crossan have picked up on this idea, and they discuss ritual aspects of Judaism as modes of resistance to the “twin imperialisms” of Hellenistic culture and Roman military domination.²⁷ Here the Meyers-Reed indicators of Judaism, especially stone cups and *miqva'ot*, are recast, correctly in my view, as modalities of resistance.

But this was not resistance to Greek culture. It must be remembered that Hellenism came to Galilee with the Hasmoneans. Their “Judaism” was already Hellenistic, notwithstanding the original anti-Hellenism of the first-generation Maccabees. A military expedition to conquer neighboring territory and to restore its cultural integrity (as seen from the conquerors’ perspective) is a rather “Greek” thing to do. John Hyrcanus named a son after Alexander. Grown to manhood, Alexander Janneus emulated his namesake.

The impulse to draw and defend sharp distinctions between “Jewish” and everything else –

Greek, Roman, pagan, gentile, Galilean, unobservant, illegitimate, indigenous, peasant – was vigorously operative in Galilee during the first centuries BCE and CE. Let us distinguish four different situations in which Judaism would need to undergo construction, definition, and reinforcement at its edges. The first situation is cities outside the historic land of Israel. Jews lived in Alexandria in Egypt, for example, as an expatriate minority population, that is, a diaspora. The second situation is Judea under Roman administration. Jews lived in Jerusalem, for example, as an indigenous people occupied, oppressed, collaborating, and to various degrees culturally subverted by Romans. The third situation is Galilee at the time of Judas Maccabaeus. Jews (i.e., Judeans) lived in a few small towns in western Galilee as an expatriate minority; this was the *irredenta* whose beleaguered minority population wrote home to Jerusalem to appeal for assistance in their conflicts with neighbors who were non-Judean, by definition, but maybe not all non-Israelite. The fourth situation is Galilee some 100 years later, on the eve of Herod's conquest. Jews (Judeans) now lived in Zippori, for example, as settlers and administrators of the recently annexed territory undergoing economic development.

The last is the situation at issue here. Its Judaism has fragile edges indeed. Jerusalem's economic and cultural hegemony is projected northward through a class of trusted administrators and managers in Galilee. They identify with the south through business and family ties. They become “even more” Jewish than their Judean cousins, in part through the costly architectural rhetoric of their domestic *miqva'ot*, synagogues, stone jars, and ossilegium burial. With sufficient disposable income, they are able to emulate the lifestyle of Jerusalem's leading families in comfortable villas with *triklinai* (Greek-style dining rooms) and they presumably employ appropriate domestic staff.

These expatriate Judeans maintain caste status through careful betrothal strategies. The most

fragile and vulnerable edge of their Judaism is the intergenerational one. By definition, an Israelite family remains such only if it can marry its sons to daughters of other Israelite families. Failure, for whatever reason, results in out-caste offspring, whose descendants forever remain non-Israelite. This is what “Israelite” meant in theory, as opposed to everyday practices. Poverty, displacement, and takeover of one's land by expatriates are all reasons why families might fail to arrange caste-preserving marriages for their children.

But children continued to be born anyway. One effect of the heightened attention to sharp edges for Judaism, in Hasmonean-occupied Galilee, is the growth of a shadow population who are placed outside of that Judaism by those who claim to be inside. That population, *am ha-‘aretz*, becomes the “non-Jews.” In Hasmonean and Herodian Galilee, they stand in for the gentiles or Philistines of bygone days.

The paragraphs just above do not report “facts” as such, much less scientifically established conclusions. At the outset, this essay asserted that the promise of Galilee beckons toward careful critical scientific investigation of data, including where data come from. There are no infallible black-box indicators to unambiguously identify “Jewish” artifacts, architectures, buildings, cities, or towns in the archaeological record. At best, the material remains may be consistent with someone's strategy for securing the edges of Judaism against countervailing factors such as time, military conquest, economic pressure, cultural variance, or human biology. Conversely, no conclusion is established as long as alternative hypotheses can be entertained that fit the data just as well or better. The “fourth situation” suggested above – Herod enters a Galilee already occupied by expatriate Judean settlers holding themselves apart from indigenous peasants – is a hypothesis that fits present data and provides an orientation for future investigation.²⁸

5. WHO WOULDN'T MARRY JESUS OF NAZARETH?

Enter Herod the Great in the middle of the first century BCE. Supposedly he is “Jewish” in the Jerusalem style and is even betrothed to a bride of impeccable priestly caste, the princess Mariammē of the Hasmonean line. Herodian manipulations of the Israelite caste system are astounding in their subtlety and their boldness. Herod does Jewish in a pragmatically Roman way. An era of cultural and economic pressure now overtakes occupied Galilee along with the rest of the Land of Israel.

Where does Jesus of Nazareth map onto this complex landscape of caste, political loyalty, economic interest, cultural taste, and religious observance?²⁹ The strongest hypothesis places Jesus in a kin group originating in Judea, with forebears who emigrated to Galilee in the wake of the Hasmonean takeover. But a defect of caste has been incurred in the generation of Jesus. This might be merely a technical defect owing to his mother's presence in Sepphoris on the day it fell to Varus after siege in 4 BCE (suggested by Ketobot 2:9), or it might have been something more troubling. The legal effect was the same. Mary subsequently could not marry a high-caste boy, so she was married off to a peasant. Some fifteen years later, Jesus is observant enough of the caste practices of his maternal grandfather's home that he declines to marry, since his offspring would inherit his defective caste. They could not be pure Israelites.³⁰

Recently, Halvor Moxnes has offered a brilliant and provocative alternative hypothesis to explain the anomalous status of Jesus as an unmarried man. Moxnes invokes Queer Theory in a powerful re-examination of Jesus' uses of place and places, especially houses.³¹ Or rather, Moxnes focuses his investigation entirely upon *ancient texts about* space and spaces. The raw data under investigation are texts, not concrete places. These texts are presumed to give access to Jesus's

behaviors and intentions with regard to concrete places.

I heartily recommend and look forward to applications of Moxnes's analysis beyond texts, that is, to real physical places, spaces, architectures, routes, cityscapes, and Galilean material culture in general. To the extent that traces of these still exist in the earth and invite observation, archaeological investigations must be undertaken to substantiate or disconfirm his thesis. One cannot extrapolate concrete anthropological and sociological data about households in first-century Galilee out of twentieth-century generalized theories, as “social science theories” of biblical interpretation are wont to do.³²

Meanwhile, the more plausible account of Jesus's decision not to marry (if indeed he was unmarried, which cannot be known with certainty³³) is that he accepted the caste system as recognized in the home of an expatriate Judean maternal grandfather. No Jewish/Judean betrothal was possible for him, nor did he turn to a local girl of the *am ha'aretz*. On my view, no pure-caste Israelite girl would have him,³⁴ and for his part did he want to start a family with an out-caste peasant as his mother had to do. Such a course of action is entirely conventional, even socially conservative, and it would have been chosen at a rather young age.

But this account does not rule out the possibility that Jesus grew queerer, in Moxnes' sense of the term, as he matured and reflected on his situation, which was hardly unique in his generation. It was queer indeed of Jesus to call God “Father,” making the whole earth into one patrilineal household and all human beings into brothers and sisters. No bastards for this Father. Here would be the ultimate repudiation of caste, whose reality the younger Jesus had accepted. The sense of this emerges on the painful edge between Judean and indigenous Galilean sensibilities.

NOTES

1. For sources and discussion of “scientific archaeology,” see Marianne Sawicki, “Archaeology as Space Technology: Digging for Gender and Class in Holy Land,” *MTSR* 6 (1994) 319-48.

2. On the black-boxing phenomenon in science, see Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986) 242-3, 259-60; Steve Woolgar, *Science: The Very Idea* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), 30-51.

3. Images transmitted from the surface of Mars may be viewed through www.nasa.gov.

4. See entries for Bethsaida and the Sea of Galilee in John J. Rousseau and Rami Arav, *Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

5. Linda E. Patrik, “Is There An Archaeological Record?” *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 8 (1985) 27-62; discussion in Sawicki, “Archaeology as Space Technology,” 333-8.

6. Jodi Magness argues to the contrary, that the occupying Roman forces of the Tenth Legion in the first three centuries CE in Judea used kitchen implements entirely different from those found in indigenous Judean households of the same era. But the ceramic evidence that Magness presents cannot support this claim. Magness’ sample is not representative, since she does not report an entire assemblage of potsherds from any kitchen associated with the Roman occupation camps at Jerusalem. She examined only the sherds of a nearby Roman kiln works – which quite plausibly manufactured *only* those pans and utensils that Legion chefs could not obtain from local indigenous potters. Magness’s evidence is entirely consistent with the scenario that she claims to rule out: that local people worked for the Romans in camp kitchens furnished both with pots of traditional

indigenous design and with pots made specially at the new Roman kiln works for exotic Italian recipes. See Jodi Magness, “In the Footsteps of the Tenth Roman Legion in Judea,” in *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, History, and Ideology*, ed. Andrea M. Berlin and J. Andrew Overman (London: Routledge, 2002) 189-212.

7. Mordechai Aviam, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Galilee: 25 Years of Archaeological Excavations and Surveys, Hellenistic to Byzantine Periods* (Rochester, NY: Univ. of Rochester Press, 2004), 41.

8. Aviam, *Jews, Pagans and Christians*, 42; see also 49.

9. Cited by Aviam, *Jews, Pagans and Christians*, 42, with reference to Zvi Gal, *Lower Galilee During the Iron Age* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992) 106. Compare 2 Kings 17:24-28.

10. As Jonathan L. Reed illustrates in a chart on p.33 of *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000).

11. Zvi Gal, *Lower Galilee During the Iron Age*, ASOR Dissertation Series 9, trans. Marcia Reines Josephy (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992).

12. Galilean Coarse Ware (GCW) is associated with the people whom the Hasmoneans conquered; see Aviam, *Jews, Pagans and Christians*, 46-49. In several places in upper Galilee and at Yodfat, GCW was found near ceramics or stone or metal items decorated with human figures, although apparently not in the same locus with them.

13. The thesis of pure Judaism in Galilee by the first century CE, especially in the city of Sepphoris, is advanced by Eric Meyers and his students. See Eric Meyers, “The Challenge of Hellenism for Early Judaism and Christianity,” *BA* 55 (1992) 84-91; Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*; and Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, SNTS Monograph Series 118

(Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002).

14. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 27; see also 23-43.

15. John Dominic Crossan has endorsed Reed's view. See Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

16. Meyers, "Challenge of Hellenism" 87-88.

17. Marianne Sawicki, "Archaeology as Space Technology: Digging for Gender and Class in Holy Land," *MTSR* 6 (1994) 319-348. See pp. 341-3.

18. Miriam Peskowitz, "Empty Fields and the Romance of the Holy Land: A Response to Marianne Sawicki's 'Archaeology' of Judaism, Gender, and Class," *MTSR* 9 (1997) 259-282. Peskowitz went on to become a social commentator and blogger; see *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother* (Emeryville, CA: Avalon/SealPress, 2005). The accusation of anti-semitism received a response in Marianne Sawicki, "Having Been Outed as a Crypto-Christian Anti-Semite, Can One Say 'Shalom'?" *MTSR* 9 (1997) 283-93. Race hatred and religious intolerance of every kind must be actively challenged, refuted, and renounced by scholars.

19. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 44; see also 28.

20. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 56.

21. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 50 note 68.

22. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 157-8.

23. Aviam, *Jews, Pagans and Christians*, 19.

24. Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999). I am indebted to Cohen's research, arguments, and opinions in what follows, but my applications to Galilee and Judea of the first centuries BCE and CE make extrapolations that he might not endorse.

25. Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 124-5.

26. Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 116-121; first published in “Spatial Management of Gender and Labor in Greco-Roman Galilee,” *Archaeology and the World of Galilee: Texts and Contexts in the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, 7-27, ed. Douglas R. Edwards and Thomas McCollough (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997). Andrea M. Berlin concurs with this view, asserting that “the archaeological evidence demonstrates that for over two generations [before the first revolt], Galilean Jews resisted Rome – individually, collectively, consistently, and actively.” See “Romanization and Anti-Romanization in Pre-Revolt Galilee,” in *First Jewish Revolt*, ed. Berlin and Overman (London: Routledge, 2002) 70.

27. Resistance expressed through material culture is argued by Crossan and Reed throughout *Excavating Jesus*. For example see 137 ff., 161 ff.

28. The edges of the three demographic groups are to be sought. For their expected archaeological signatures, see Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 138-141.

29. The answer must meet the criterion of contextual plausibility, and should also permit an alignment of Jesus with the tradition of Jewish non-violent resistance, as convincingly argued by Sean Freyne in *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus-Story* (London: T&T Clark International, Continuum, 2004) 22, 169, and *passim*.

30. That is, no legal marriage is arranged for him and he declines opportunities for a less formal liaison. See Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 184-98 and *passim*.

31. See Halvor Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in His Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003). On the deviance of the maleness of Jesus, see Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 186-7.

32. Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 75-80, 209-12, and *passim*. A similar critique has been advanced by F. Gerald Downing, "'Honor' Among Exegetes," *CBQ* 61 (1999) 53-73; see also "In Quest of First-Century C.E. Galilee." *CBQ* 66 (2004) 78-97.

33. The question is considered by John P. Meier in *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 332-45.

34. That is, no pure-caste girl's father would have him for a son-in-law. It wasn't up to the girl.