

# How a mainstream historical method creates its own Jesus

Not quite a Book Review: Comparing "*Israël verdeeld*" (Israel divided) by Lendering 2014 with "*The simple mathematics of Jesus*" by Colignatus 2012

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## Abstract

Lendering (2014) "*Israël verdeeld*" (Israel divided) - henceforth JLIV - claims to present a history of the Jewish world in 180 BC - 70 AD. The book has mixed features of a scholarly book and a book to popularise historical findings for a general audience. JLIV frames Jesus as a historical figure. JLIV also discusses the historical method but not the criticism about it for its application to Jesus. The author adheres to the motto: "Relevance is the enemy of history" (J.P. Meier). The focus on the Jewish world in JLIV implies an emphasis on that Jesus was a Jew - and thus marginal to the Greek and Roman world. The implied argument is: Why would Greeks and Romans worship a Jew as their God ? JLIV does not explicitly discuss other scenario's than a historical Jesus. JLIV basically neglects the arguments of serious authors who analyse that Jesus did not exist as a historical figure, and thus is not even a legend but a myth. There are various scenarios how a Jesus as a mere idea could have come about. A possibility is that a sect of Hellenised Jews came upon the creation themselves. Another possibility is deliberate deception. JLIV does not put the Greek and Roman conquest of Israel en Judea at center stage that can explain this deception. The creed around Jesus might have been created by the Romans to pacify the religiously fanatical Jews. It is only after some centuries and by more processes that the Roman Empire eventually adopted the creed as its own, as a twist of history. For some readers it may matter whether Jesus really existed. For scientists it doesn't matter but for them science and truthfulness matter. The relevance that Meier and Lendering refer to is that people feel cheated and scientists feel distressed by religious authorities and 'scholars' who distort truth. To understand JLIV on the historical method and JLIV's response to the criticism on the historical Jesus, the readers of JLIV are not well served by JLIV itself. For this, one must look at other texts by Lendering. While Lendering may present JLIV as his position and answer, that position and answer isn't there, while what is presented elsewhere fails. Potential readers of JLIV are advised to wait for a second revised edition. Science can progress when authors are free to develop their argument but it is part of the process to respond to criticism.

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*People who like quotes love meaningless generalizations.*

Graham Greene (1904-1991)

Favouritely quoted by Fenna van den Brug (1925-2014)

*Relevance is the enemy of history.*

John P. Meier (1942)

Favouritely quoted by Jona Lendering (1964)

*Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres.*

Gaius Julius Caesar (100 - 44 BC)

## **Summary**

Comparing Lendering's book "*Israël verdeeld*" - henceforth JLIV - with my own analysis and book SMOJ gives these findings, in quotes from the body of the text below:

- His presented 'historical method' apparently isn't a scientific method.
- His book gives a serious blow to my respect for Lendering as a historian.
- Lendering has it wrong on the key command to honour God and love thy neighbour. He claims to look at the Jewish origins of Christianity but doesn't know yet how to read Jewish texts. The separation between Judaism and Christianity didn't come about by the declaration by Nicaea in 325 that Jesus was God, but by the destruction of Jerusalem & the Temple and the wish to create a Christianity without circumcision - while the teachers of Judaism stick to circumcision and still don't think that Jesus has existed.
- It makes a difference whether Jesus was a preacher and healer who was only later depicted as God himself, or whether he was deliberately created as fiction. One might add: psychologically it makes a huge difference for many people. In the first case one might argue that there still was a 'divine spark'. In the second case people feel cheated.
- Those who state "*Relevance is the enemy of history*" (J.P. Meier, J. Lendering) may be worse enemies of history, because it is a non-sequitur, which shows that they cannot think properly. Relevance is a very good motive to study history, and to study history we must rely on scientific methods.
- Indeed, we only have Flavius Josephus's (FJ) own words how he switched sides from the Jews to the Romans and saved his life. Supposedly he told Vespasian that the latter would become emperor, and that the Jewish predictions on the coming of a ruler of the world and messiah from Israel applied to him. It is curious that FJ is critical of messiahs in other cases. But, once Vespasian had become emperor - and thus a god to the Romans - it might not be illogical for Vespasian to ask FJ whether the Jewish creed had more predictions for him, or to ask FJ to, please, tell his Jewish countrymen that they should worship him as their ruler and messiah. By implication, FJ would have had the task to create Christianity, as Vespasian clearly wasn't circumcised. Apparently smart FJ managed to save the Old Testament and convince Vespasian that he shouldn't aspire to become king of the Jews himself, but let a fictitious Jesus do so. But this is only one of the scenarios. When I buy a book by a historian on a subject like JLIV in 2014 I would expect a discussion of the existence of this approach, and possibly mention of arguments to reject it, rather than a complete neglect.
- JLIV claims to present history so that Jesus comes along naturally as a historical figure. JLIV sees no need to explicitly discuss the critique on the supposed existence of Jesus. JLIV however still observes a need to discuss the 'historical method' (...). The critique on Jesus is collected under the denominator: they don't understand science. This approach is awkward.
- JLIV might say that it 'answered' to critique, but in this manner it is no real answer. Since JLIV has little discussion, it is necessary to use other texts by Lendering (available on the internet).

## **Introduction**

This is not quite a Book Review. A review aspires at abstracting and characterizing the book under review, and leaves it at that. I originally considered trying this but it soon appeared that there was most value in comparing Lendering's book with mine.

Jona Lendering (2014) - henceforth **JLIV** - is in Dutch. Its title may be translated as: "*Israel divided. How two world religions rose from a small kingdom*".<sup>1</sup> Earlier short reviews in Dutch of JLIV are by Marcel Hulspas (2014b) and Mischa van der Giessen (2014), while there is a weblog entry by Cornelis Hoogerwerf.<sup>2</sup> This present discussion is in English since the issue merits an international audience.<sup>3</sup> We may suppose that JLIV will have an English translation or (revised) edition eventually.

I will contrast JLIV with my own book, Colignatus (2012), "*The simple mathematics of Jesus*" - henceforth **SMOJ**. Some of my later texts are in the **Appendices** below.

***There is a 2014 book by Richard Carrier on the historicity of Jesus, that I haven't read yet. Carrier rejects a "historical Jesus", as I do. Probably a comparison of JLIV and the book by Carrier is more interesting than the following comparison of JLIV with SMOJ. However, I have only my notes on SMOJ now. Some preliminary points are in the first section below though.***

I am no historian but an econometrician and teacher of mathematics. Economics deals with people and benefits from historical perspectives, however. Below shows how a statistical model can be useful for this discussion. SMOJ is my proposal for education to consider Jesus and the origin of Christianity from various disciplines including mathematics education. I regard history as the responsibility of the historians and my contribution would come from the education in mathematics. We tend to apply mathematics to numbers and space, but it can also be applied to information and patterns in general. An application to Jesus and the origin of Christianity can be interesting for students and awaken more interest in mathematics itself. There is also a philosophical angle: since at least Pythagoras and Plato two perfections have been associated: the perfection of number & geometry and the perfection of God. It is useful to find a place for this somewhere. My suggestion is that philosophy uses the context of the empirical science of the education in mathematics, since the perfections discussed in philosophy are met in empirical discussion in precisely that setting. Thus, for the following, keep the education in mathematical abstraction in mind.

Lendering is one of the founders of Livius.org that provides for educational courses in the history of antiquity. A core point of this discussion is that Lendering regrettably did not consider SMOJ (also for his courses) before finishing JLIV.

The following discussion must restate points that have already been developed more systematically in SMOJ. I have considered not reviewing or discussing JLIV. However, it may be useful to give some additional comments. Here I can also collect and translate some texts that I wrote after completing SMOJ, in particular on the 'historical method', see the **Appendices** below.

Readers new to JLIV are advised to first read SMOJ and wait for a revised edition of JLIV (and a reaction of Lendering on SMOJ and this present discussion).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://mainzerbeobachter.com/2014/11/07/israel-verdeeld-errata>: Dutch: "De grootste vergissing is overigens... de titel! Het boek had eigenlijk als ondertitel *De Joodse wereld aan het begin van de jaartelling* moeten hebben. Hoe de voor de PR bedoelde slagzin *Hoe een klein koninkrijk veranderde in twee wereldgodsdiensten* tot ondertitel kan zijn gepromoveerd, is een vooralsnog onopgelost raadsel." PM. The current subtitle is "Hoe uit een klein koninkrijk twee wereldreligies ontstonden".

<sup>2</sup> Cornelis Hoogerwerf: "When historians of antiquity begin to write about a subject that generally is studied by specialists in the early Judaism and/or Christianity, then this always creates an exciting tension." Dutch: "Als oudhistorici gaan schrijven over een onderwerp dat doorgaans door specialisten in het vroege joden- en/of christendom bestudeerd wordt, is dat altijd spannend", <https://gegrammena.wordpress.com/2014/11/23/enkele-opmerkingen-bij-jona-lenderings-israel-verdeeld/>

<sup>3</sup> See Livius.org and the collaboration with LacusCurtius: <http://www.livius.org/about>

JLIV has the general objective of presenting a history of 'the Jewish world' (actually larger than Judea and Israel) around the year 0, with the window chosen as ca. 180 BC to 70 AD. The major event is the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in 70 AD. The stated general objective is not pursued consistently though. JLIV presents a 'historical Jesus' as part of the general history, but this means that he actually takes a *position* on this. My discussion will disregard much of his wider historical objective - I am not a historian - and focuses on the origin of Christianity.

This reflects the problem with the subtitle as mentioned in footnote 1. Apparently JLIV intended to present the various sects in Israel at that time. However, the (surprise)(more commercial) subtitle focuses on the separation of Judaism and Christianity, i.e. the creation of the New Testament (NT) of the Christians that is not accepted by the Judaism of the Old Testament (OT). The following discussion focuses on this issue. We will focus even more on the following difference between JLIV and SMOJ:

- (a) JLIV holds it likely that Jesus would be a historical person. If you don't agree with this then, firmly, you don't understand the historical method or haven't looked into the proper historical sources.
- (b) SMOJ points to the earlier creation of the god Serapis, when the Greeks conquered Egypt and Ptolemy Soter had to integrate Greek and Egyptian religions.<sup>4</sup> SMOJ finds it likely that Jesus is a similar deliberate creation by religious editing, comparable to fiction like Santa Claus or Sherlock Holmes. Indeed, Jesus is Santa Claus for grown-ups.<sup>5</sup> If you don't agree then you *might* not understand the scientific method or you *might* be confused by authors who don't do so.

Earlier I discussed this point: "A judge must decide whether the accused is guilty or not. Must a historian decide whether Jesus existed or not ? Or can a historian live with uncertainty ? Shouldn't the historian emphasise the uncertainty, rather than guess at a verdict ? (...) Up to now, these historians don't work like this. They behave like judges but in fact they conceal the uncertainty." See my weblog.<sup>6</sup> That same text already became a section in Colignatus (2014a). For your convenience it is included again as **Appendix B**.

In October 2013 I had a short Dutch text that anticipated on JLIV, given Lendering's advance statements.<sup>7</sup> Instead of discussing SMOJ, Lendering advised me to read Casey (2014), which I did, and then reviewed in Colignatus (2014a) in May. Partly at the occasion of the sad and premature death of Rob Nanninga of the Dutch skeptic magazine, there is also Colignatus (2014b) in June. **Appendices A, B, C and D** are from my weblog. Apparently all these texts did not convince Lendering (nor his internal group of critical pre-readers), and he presented JLIV at the end of October 2014.<sup>8</sup>

The following first restates Colignatus (2014b), translating this from Dutch into English, and inserting references to the Appendices when relevant. This will introduce the reader to the approach by SMOJ before we look at JLIV. This sequence allows a vaccination against the tendency by historians to behave as judges on historical truth.

First, though, it seems useful to make some preliminary points on Richard Carrier and his approach to the historicity of Jesus, still without having read his book. An interesting lecture is at INR3.<sup>9</sup> I read Carrier debunking of Atwill's version of the Flavian conspiracy theory,<sup>10</sup> but I haven't read Atwill either. For that debunking, Carrier gives useful links to Verenna,<sup>11</sup> Price<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serapis>

<sup>5</sup> True believers in God however have nothing to fear but fear itself.

<sup>6</sup> <https://boycotttholland.wordpress.com/2014/04/27/historical-judgement-on-jesus-and-the-sieve-of-realism>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.frontaalnaakt.nl/archives/over-jezus.html>

<sup>8</sup> Pre-publication in Dutch: <http://www.athenaeum.nl/leesfragment/jona-lendering-israel-verdeeld>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkxYJfiompl&list=PLhXrLKu\\_La8goMlj\\_sXjzR2GnQ\\_iTKcG&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkxYJfiompl&list=PLhXrLKu_La8goMlj_sXjzR2GnQ_iTKcG&index=6)

<sup>10</sup> <http://freethoughtblogs.com/carrier/archives/4664>

<sup>11</sup> <http://tomverenna.wordpress.com/2012/09/25/no-joe-atwill-rome-did-not-invent-jesus>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.robertmpprice.mindvendor.com/rev\\_atwill.htm](http://www.robertmpprice.mindvendor.com/rev_atwill.htm)

and Acharya S.<sup>13</sup> Let me shortly comment on this, as a non-historian who merely proposes the angle in SMOJ, and who has to make sense of what historians discuss.

### **Some preliminary points on the separation of Judaism and Christianity**

Sacred texts don't drop from the sky but are composed by authors. Thus it seems an innocent observation that the cause for the separation of Judaism and Christianity lies in the deliberate creation of Christianity. Let us for a moment forget about the deliberate creation by a historical Jesus and his apostles.

The discussion here is about the possible scenario's for the myth.

SMOJ discusses Pythagoras, Plato, Philo of Alexandria and the Therapeutae and others. If you read SMOJ then you know what I skip here. Philo's docetic belief existed around 0 AD. As "Yehoshua" merely means "God saves" or "Saviour" then one can imagine docetic texts referring to such abstract saviour God around 0 AD, in which Hellenised Jews applied a Jewish label. There is also a Greek word "Chrestos" (with an "e") that signifies "good", to complicate the issue.<sup>14</sup>

Christianity with an incarnate Jesus who dies from the cross and resurrects, gets form perhaps only around 100 AD. A late date runs into conflict with the idea that Tacitus around 115 AD referred to Christian hearsay.<sup>15</sup> Thus there will be various texts (proto-gospels) early on,<sup>16</sup> and Acharya S allows for more definite gospels closer to 200 AD.<sup>17</sup>

A sensible point to look for creation of an incarnate Jesus is after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD. It is fortunate that I completed my notes for SMOJ at the time when Lena Einhorn (2012) was developing her time-shift hypothesis, holding that the New Testament follows Flavius Josephus but sets events at an earlier date to disassociate them from the uprising in 70 AD.

To save the Old Testament from prosecution and destruction by the Romans, there was need for a new God to worship, no longer quite the God of the Old Testament who apparently provoked uprisings against the Romans, but a new one who respected the Old Testament but presented a more appeasing message. The rest is derivative.

A key stumbleblock between Judaism and newly created Christianity at that time was circumcision. The Greek and Roman world was abhorred by this practice. By replacing it with baptism ("the Pauline interpretation"), it became possible to create the New Testament (NT) as a framework for foreign acceptance of major ideas of the Old Testament (OT). This integration was furthered by extending neighbourly love across the borders: *Love thy enemies*. Other and smaller differences in opinion got exaggerated over time, so that those might seem larger now than the root cause. It is remarkable that Lendering doesn't pay much attention to circumcision. Circumcision seems more accepted nowadays, in particular in the USA, so that scholars may no longer understand the original barrier. Perhaps my benefit is that I still regard it as a horrible and barbarian mutilation.

Another difference between Judaism and Christianity is that the teachers of Judaism do not think that Jesus has existed. It doesn't seem that this has been a stumbleblock like circumcision. Eventually Judaism might have accepted that Jesus existed as much as Moses, David and Isaiah who are also described as if they existed, so that the gospel of Mark could have been included as another section of the OT. It may well be that the creators of the gospels worked in this tradition and hoped that this would happen. Indeed, the Christian concept that we now have to wait for the Second Coming of Christ puts Christianity back into

<sup>13</sup> <http://freethoughtnation.com/contributing-writers/63-acharya-s/729-a-conversation-on-the-caesars-messiah-thesis.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.truthbeknown.com/suetoniuschreste.html>

<sup>15</sup> [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Witnesses\\_to\\_the\\_Historicity\\_of\\_Jesus](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Witnesses_to_the_Historicity_of_Jesus)

<sup>16</sup> Carrier point 2: "We know there were over forty Gospels, yet the four chosen for the canon were not selected until well into the 2nd century, and not by anyone in the Roman aristocracy. Likewise which Epistles were selected."

<sup>17</sup> <http://stellarhousepublishing.com/gospel-dates.html>

the Judean fold of waiting for the End of Time. However, while circumcision was the key stumbleblock back then, nowadays with this larger acceptance of it, existence has become the stumbleblock, since teachers of Christianity insist that Jesus Christ really, *really*, existed and really was God. Adopted by the Romans there was no need to be appeasing to the Judean creed.

A question is whether such proto-gospels were written (orally retold) starting soon after 70 AD or closer to 100 AD. Another question is whether the Flavians were involved or whether it arose from some Therapeuta or displaced Sadducees. Deliberate meddling by the Flavians would probably cause an earlier date.

The mentioned weblinks by Carrier, Price, Verenna en Acharya S make it doubtful that Atwill found the right scenario.<sup>18</sup> However, some meddling by the Flavians still seems possible. The following table considers some key points.

<i>Some key points</i>	<i>Richard Carrier on these (taken from his discussion of Atwill's scheme)<sup>19</sup> and a short response</i>
Jesus is a Jew and thus the texts with him as the hero will have a Jewish origin as some base. The writers of the early texts (playwrights are bit more likely than oral tradition) however must have been Hellenised or Romanised e.g. since they didn't insist on circumcision.	
After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD the surviving Jews clearly had an objective to present themselves as peaceful. The Pharisees could develop in Rabbinate Judaism but the Sadducees who worked around the Temple and who rejected the Talmud of the Pharisees & Rabbis had to find an alternative to save their OT.	Carrier agrees in point 5: "Christianity was probably constructed to "divert Jewish hostility and aggressiveness into a pacifist religion, supportive of—and subservient to—Roman rule," but not by Romans, but exasperated Jews like Paul, who saw Jewish militarism as unacceptably disastrous in contrast with the obvious advantages of retooling their messianic expectations to produce the peaceful moral reform of society. The precedents were all there already in pre-Christian Jewish ideology and society (in Philo's philosophy, in Essene and Qumranic efforts to solve the same problems, and so on) so we don't have to posit super-genius Aryans helping the poor little angry Jews to calm down."
Ptolemy Soter had been clever enough to create Serapis, in the third century BC. <sup>20</sup>  <i>Priests-scholars are in the business of creating or defending a creed, in rewriting old texts into sermons and so on.</i>  The Jew Flavius Josephus (FJ) in Vespasian's household in Rome called himself a Pharisee but had a Sadducee background and may have had a similar objective to save the OT from annihilation. At the minimum he seems to entertained the idea that he might try to insert the OT into Roman thought. (And perhaps he	Carrier disagrees in point 1: "The Roman aristocracy was nowhere near as clever as Atwill's theory requires. They certainly were not so masterfully educated in the Jewish scriptures and theology that they could compose hundreds of pages of elegant passages based on it. And it is very unlikely they would ever conceive of a scheme like this, much less think they could succeed at it (even less, actually do so)."  Carrier's position can be rejected. The Romans presented their emperors as Gods. They had a council on foreign gods, of which Tacitus was a

<sup>18</sup> Carrier point 3: " The Gospels and the Epistles all contradict each other far too much to have been composed with a systematic aim in mind." and Point 4: " The Gospels and the Epistles differ far too much in style to have come from the same hand, and many show signs of later doctoring that would problematize attempts to confirm any theory like Atwill's."

<sup>19</sup> <http://freethoughtblogs.com/carrier/archives/4664>

<p>even succeeded ....!)</p> <p>He had ample resources to link up with his acquaintances.</p>	<p>member.<sup>21</sup> They knew. Motive and opportunity.</p>
<p>The Romans also had an interest. Why not help in the development of a version of the religion that would make the Jews more peaceful ? A story like "Okay, here is your Messiah, put to death upon the instigation of the conservative Jews, but a preacher of neighbourly love and giving Caesar his due, so stop complaining, and pay your taxes." An important issue is slavery too.</p> <p>Measuring the success would require a counterfactual: how violent the Jews would have become if Christianity had not been created ...?</p>	<p>Carrier disagrees in point 6: "Pacifying Jews would not have been possible with a cult that eliminated Jewish law and accepted Gentiles as equals, and in actual fact Christianity was pretty much a failure in Palestine. Its success was achieved mainly in the Diaspora, where the Romans rarely had any major problems with the Jews. The Jewish War was only fought in Palestine, and not even against all the Jews there (many sided with Rome). How would inventing a religion that would have no chance of succeeding in the heart of Palestine but instead was tailor made to succeed outside Palestine, ever help the Romans with anything they considered important?"</p>
<p>The Jewish diaspora was important for Temple Judaism, (1) taxes, (2) pilgrims. Cutting off Diaspora Jews from Judea - by converting them to Christians who paid taxes to Rome, might be a scheme (though perhaps the tax on being Jewish was more profitable ....).</p>	<p>Carrier disagrees: "And this is what jars with Atwill's thesis: his theory can't make sense of why the Romans targeted Diaspora Jews, in order to pacify Palestinian Jews. As the Romans would have to have been doing, if they composed their fake new bible in Greek (as his theory entails they did)."</p> <p>Carriers position is not quite convincing: there was the Septuagint in Greek, there was a Hellenising Jewish Diaspora. It would make sense to absorb these, rather than let them return to older ways of Rabbinate Judaism or fight for a Third Temple.</p>
	<p>Carrier in point 8: "The Romans knew one thing well: War. Social ideology they were never very good at.* That's why Rome always had such problems keeping its empire together, and why social discontent and other malfunctions continued to escalate until the empire started dissolving. Rome expected to solve every problem militarily instead—and up until the 3rd century Rome did so quite well. The Jewish War was effectively over in just four years (any siege war was expected to take at least three, and Vespasian was actually busy conquering Rome in the fourth year of that War). So why would they think they needed any other solution?"</p> <p>This gets a rebuttal by "Roo Bookaroo" in " The Roman knew many more things well than just war. Architecture, administration, aqueduct and road building, education, teaching, literature, law, art, engineering, a solid hierarchical structure of society, etc...They were not just soldiers like the Huns. They kept the Roman world and civilization going for 1,000 years,</p>

<sup>20</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serapis>

<sup>21</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quindecimviri\\_sacris\\_faciundis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quindecimviri_sacris_faciundis)

	which is more than any of our modern nations has so far been able to do." and see the subsequent discussion
We cannot suppose that we can archeologically retrace the editing rooms where the early texts were written, but we can allow for the notion of meddling. In World War I the Germans shipped Lenin from Switzerland to Russia with gold to destabilise their enemy, another example how meddling may come back with a vengeance.	
The appearance of Halley's Comet in 66 AD remains a point to consider. <sup>22</sup> Astrologers must have known about its cycle and have expected it. Josephus does mention the messiah cult. Rome itself had its four emperors in 69 AD.	
Thus: the possibility of an "artificial Jesus" is a serious option.  Starting from Philo and the Therapeuta, the rewriting of the OT into the NT might be more evolutionary from cult to religion, be accelerated by displaced Sadducees by themselves, or somewhat by Flavians with hired Sadducees.	Carrier seems to select a more evolutionary scenario.

At this moment I don't know yet whether I will get to read Carrier's book but above preliminary notes at least give some perspective on views. Let us now continue with the comparison of SMOJ with the book JLIV that I did read.

### **Scientific method and use of statistics**

This section doesn't intend to review the scientific method and the use of statistics, but only intends to highlight some aspects that apparently have been lacking in the discussion about the 'historical Jesus'. It is better to have this as a foundation, before considering JLIV and its view on the 'historical method'.

#### **A point w.r.t. the history of statistics and probability theory**

Statistics and probability theory are not without methodological issues, and it is very useful to also study how those subjects came about historically. SMOJ refers to Franklin (2001) on the history of probability. Like much of science, probability theory started in law - as perhaps also the idea of axiomatics in geometry. In evaluating murders and ship wrecks, judges encountered the problem that witnesses might not tell the truth. Hence a working hypothesis was: One piece of evidence is no evidence. We find the use of this rule also in JLIV, see below. It is useful to mention this awareness in SMOJ at this point, since it might be easy for historians to presume that an econometrician and teacher of mathematics might have no idea about the 'historical method' or perhaps even the "history of methods". I advise students of Jesus to read SMOJ before passing judgement.

Interestingly, for the discussion below on the gospels, wikipedia alerts us to these angles:<sup>23</sup>

- (a) "Eta Linnemann, formerly a follower of Bultmann, rejected Q, and Markan priority, for a variation of the Two Gospel hypothesis that holds that the Mosaic requirement for "two witnesses" made two Jewish Gospels a necessity in the Diaspora audiences.[42]"
- (b) This [42] is: "Robert L. Thomas *Three views on the origins of the Synoptic Gospels* 2002 p255, and p322 "Farnell 's third axiom notes, quoting Linnemann, that the reason for four independent Gospels stems from the legal principle of Deuteronomy 19:15b: "[O]n the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed."

<sup>22</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halley%27s\\_Comet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halley%27s_Comet)

<sup>23</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Q\\_source](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Q_source)

## Theology, history and fiction

There are some groups who write about the past that we should beware of:

- (a) Theologians: they assume the existence of God.
- (b) Researchers in *New Testament Studies*: they assume the historical existence of Jesus.
- (c) Historians with wrong methods or with the attitude that it's their task to judge what the past really was, instead of emphasizing the uncertainties.

While the ingrained bias of the first two groups might be well-known, this is less well known for those last historians. Their attitude is not scientific, since science should emphasise the uncertainty that is found. We also saw the bias above on circumcision (i.e. neglecting its impact, while it curiously is rather certain). Curiously those 'scholars' still maintain positions at academia. Please observe that I am no historian, but I mention uncertainties in historical sources that historians do not mention, and that they should mention if they would stop acting as judges.

The discussion can be clarified with the following table with positions A, B and C. Christian theology assumes the gospels, and it can only state A. There is a theological debate on the second row, apparently advanced by Aslan, between A and B, between whether Jesus was a son of God or not. We are familiar with this debate from Islam, that recognises Jesus only as a prophet. Alongside the theological debate there is the historical debate, since historians cannot say anything about the divine nature of Jesus. Relevant for us is the discussion between B and C, whether Jesus existed or not. We find authors Aslan, Hulspas, Lendering and Van Hooff (see below) at B, and the present author at C.

View on Jesus	Son of God	No son of God
Has existed	A	B
Has been made up	n.a.	C

## Reza Aslan, Marcel Hulspas and Jona Lendering

The American Reza Aslan has a MA from Harvard in history of religion and a PhD from UCSB in sociology of religion. He now has a book on Jesus as a Zealot.<sup>24</sup> He presented his analysis at the John Adams Institute in Amsterdam in March 2014.<sup>25</sup> Marcel Hulspas (2014a), an astronomer, science journalist and author of a book on the Bible, Hulspas (2006), and Jona Lendering (2014a), with a MA in history (Leiden) and a MA in mediterranean culture (Free University Amsterdam), attended the lecture and wrote rather negative reviews - and Hulspas used the word "charlatan". Hulspas and Lendering state:

Lendering: "Already a century ago Albert Schweitzer concluded that we only knew with certainty that the Jewish teacher of wisdom had expected that the end of time was coming soon."<sup>26</sup>

Hulspas: "Once you are aware of that, and thus put aside those stories as 'unfortunately no facts but theology', then you are left with darned little. Jesus was a Jew, he preached, and was tried by the Romans. That's all. Other, non-Biblical sources of that period, like Josephus and the papyri of Qumran, can supplement our understanding of that time. But the historical Jesus (who is not mentioned there) still doesn't get one step closer."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> <http://rezaaslan.com/about>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.john-adams.nl/reza-aslan>

<sup>26</sup> Dutch: "Al een eeuw geleden concludeerde Albert Schweitzer dat we alleen zeker wisten dat de Joodse wijsheidsleraar had verwacht dat het einde der tijden nabij was."

<sup>27</sup> Dutch: "Als je dat eenmaal door hebt, en deze verhalen dus als 'helaas geen feiten maar theologie' opzij legt, hou je verdomd weinig over. Jezus was een Jood, hij predikte, en werd door de Romeinen veroordeeld. That's all. Andere, niet-Bijbelse bronnen uit die tijd, zoals Josephus en de Qumran-geschriften, kunnen ons beeld van die tijd inkleuren. Maar de historische Jezus (die daarin nergens wordt genoemd) komt daarmee nog steeds geen stap dichterbij."

Hulspas and Lendering do not mention the possibility of fiction. They stick to a 'historical Jesus', and thus create room for the confusion that the official teachings by the churches have a historical core provided by an inspired healer-preacher, who really might have thought that his death would save us from original sin. This Jesus might be seen as having been touched by a divine spark.

The problem with debunking nonsense about Jesus thus is that it can actually generate more confusion. Hulspas and Lendering debunk nonsense by Aslan, but they do this in such manner that their readers aren't helped much. The blind must help the crippled, but why choose those handicaps when you can see and walk ? The proper analysis would be:

- (a) We can no longer determine whether Jesus actually existed.
- (b) It is more likely that Jesus is a deliberate creation by religious writing, comparable to fiction like Santa Claus or Sherlock Holmes. See **Appendix C** for reasons why some religious writers would want to rewrite the Old Testament (OT) into the New Testament (NT).

Nobody will deny that there have been bishops or detectives in the past, but the question whether such fiction like Santa Claus or Sherlock Holmes 'really existed' deserves the clear answer: No. See Colignatus (2014a) for a discussion that Santa Claus originated in the Stone Age as Osiris and Anubis in Egypt or as Wodan flying in the sky on his horse Sleipnir, and that the Church imposed the image of the bishop of Myra.

In the same manner the Romans will surely have crucified some healer-prophet at some time. See **Appendix D** for an estimate that there might even have been 10 such crucified preachers called Jesus. The point then is that there is no direct link between a particular healer-prophet and the origin of Christianity. The only link for one Jesus is by the gospels but those gospels are religious creations. Aslan's question "what was the historical Jesus like ?" becomes inadequate when the figure was fictitious.

### **Statistical decision theory as a model**

In Holland I should not have to explain the following. According to CBS Statistics Netherlands, at least 67% has a secondary school education, which includes statistics, and at least 27% has a higher education, which also includes the basic statistical decision model. Students of history will have had that model in highschool ("wiskunde A").<sup>28</sup> Of course, what is learned may be forgotten if not used. Overall it might be useful to restate the model.

Statistics looks at reality. Statistical decision theory gives a model for how to decide based upon empirical evidence. A much used very basic decision model has two hypotheses:

- $H_0$  is the null-hypothesis. As a rule this is what you would tend to accept without proof.
- $H_1 = \text{not-}H_0$  is the alternative hypothesis.
- At issue is whether new empirical evidence would cause you to reject the null hypothesis.

The rule is: *Something does not exist, unless proven to exist.* Thus, a statistician would presume that there is no Jesus unless there is convincing evidence of such existence.

It is rather impossible to prove that Santa Claus doesn't exist, since he might be behind your back while you are not looking. A better strategy is to accept his existence only when he invites you to step in his sled and participate in the Xmas night gift spree, which is a fine theme for various Hollywood films.

In deciding about  $H_0$ , statistical decision theory recognises the errors of type I and type II:

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<sup>28</sup> Dutch: "Bevolking; hoogstbehaald onderwijsniveau; geslacht, leeftijd en herkomst", <http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=82275ned&D1=0&D2=0&D3=0&D4=0-1,4-5&D5=0,4-5,8,12-14&D6=17&VW=T>

The error of type I arises when hypothesis H0 is true, but rejected.

The error of type II arises when hypothesis H0 is false, but not rejected.

Statisticians tend to make a difference between "not rejecting" and "accepting". Statistical theory namely presumes probability theory. When H0 can be rejected statistically then it doesn't imply that one can fully accept H1, since there is that chance (of type 1) that H0 still is true. (If H0 is true then that chance can be calculated to have the size  $\alpha$ .) This statistical approach fits the skeptical attitude that truth is hard to prove. This attitude can be advised in general, also w.r.t. Jesus.

Decisions \ Hypotheses	H0 is true	Not-H0 = H1 is true
Decision to stick to H0	Correct decision (prob. 1 - $\alpha$ )	Error of Type II (probability $\beta$ )
Decision to reject H0	Error of Type I (probability $\alpha$ )	Correct decision (prob. 1 - $\beta$ )

When applied to Jesus, the proper H0 and H1 are:

H0 = C = "Historically there was no person who became known as Jesus Christ."  
H1 = B = "Historically there was a person..." = "His existence is no fiction."

As scientist I am agnostic about the existence of God and wouldn't know whether H0 or H1 is true. As scientist I start from H0 and determine that the evidence doesn't convince of rejection. But it would remain an issue of probability, or rather, given the somewhat complex ontology of probability, an issue of plausibility or acceptability. Given this uncertainty the scientific attitude still causes agnosis / agnosticism. As a person, though, I am an atheist and presume that H0 will be true.

Aslan, Hulspas, Lendering and Van Hooff seem to select H1 rather firmly, as if they are judges who must decide about history. They make the error of Type I since they regard Jesus as a historical figure while he is a fiction.

You might say that Aslan has a point in his favour for opposing the official view by the churches that Jesus would be the son of God (i.e. the difference between A and B). However, Aslan operates within the theological debate, and tries to convince believers that Jesus would be a mere Zealot. But these are issues of belief that are not relevant for science.

Relevant for science is that Aslan apparently also adopts H1 that Jesus at least was a historical figure. He seems to forget that H0 is the basic hypothesis to depart from. The choice is not between "either son of God or zealot" but between "either some fiction or some reality". The proper attitude to oppose the nonsense by Aslan is to point to H0.

The position at H0 has the luxury of skepsis: it is H1 that requires proof. It suffices to debunk supposed evidence for H1. Hulspas and Lendering might not follow that strategy or have fallen for H1 too soon. Perhaps they started from H1 anyway. The debate of Aslan versus Hulspas and Lendering is out of focus, it causes some fireworks but doesn't provide a strong foundation.

### **Historians as judges over the past: Bias by neglecting the null hypothesis**

Under the null hypothesis, Jesus is fiction. In that case we would like to have an explanation how this fiction came about or was created, and subsequently could conquer the world.

A rationale is as follows. Astronomy developed from astrology, and the latter was the state of science when the Bible was written.<sup>29</sup> The Bible is full with astrology. This holds for the OT but also for the NT that came about when the OT came into conflict with the Greeks of Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) and the Romans of Julius Caesar (100-44 BC) who eventually destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD. Hellenised Jewish authors and playwrights possibly in Alexandria - or those more conservative ones at the competitor

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<sup>29</sup> The author hopes that readers agree that astrology is nonsense.

Temple by Onias in Leontopolis, also ended in 74 AD<sup>30</sup> - or FJ in Rome as a particularly interesting case - could have done their best to save as much as possible. A core for the NT would be the book with sayings known as the book of Jesus Sirach. See **Appendix C**.

Apparently many sayings collected in Jesus Sirach were reworked as quotes from some Jesus. The NT seems to be written with the Zodiac as a plan. Jesus is born in the Sign of Capricorn and becomes at Easter the scapegoat to be sacrificed for our sins, the Lamb of God.

<sup>31</sup> Bethlehem is the "House of Bread" or the astrological House (Sign) for the sowing season of wheat and barley - which in Israel is December. See further SMOJ. This interpretation, of regarding the Bible as an astrological book, can be completed without running into problems or knots. The "simple mathematics" concerns elementary astronomy and the construction of the calendar.<sup>32</sup> There are also elementary notions about patterns and information theory.

I have been surprised since 2012 that SMOJ tends to meet lack of interest. Apparently the combination of mathematics, astronomy, astrology, Bible and Jesus doesn't work for readers and editors of Dutch magazines.<sup>33</sup>

I alerted Lendering,<sup>34</sup> Hulspas and Van Hooff explicitly on the analysis. While I start from H0 and find no reason to reject it and while they embrace H1, a reader might find it only rational that they would not be interested. That would be unscientific however. It is unscientific to neglect a counterargument. I am no historian, that is true, but if that is the reason for neglect then it is an *ad hominem* fallacy. Everyone is qualified to alert others to inconsistencies and the neglect of evidence. SMOJ discusses H0 and doesn't reject it, and it discusses H1 and rejects it, whence it would be relevant for those who think that H1 is more likely.

Also, H0 and H1 in this case will remain hypotheses since the world from around the year 0 has gone and the real evidence has been lost in time. Adherents to H1 however tend to not emphasise that uncertainty and the relevance of keeping the two hypotheses, but they claim H1 as proper history.

Jona Lendering had a decent response but it consisted of the advice to read Casey (2014), adding: "It is not the perfect book but it clarifies why many skeptical theories about the life of Jesus are superfluous."<sup>35</sup> Later he made that point in public.<sup>36</sup> As mentioned above, I then read and reviewed that book, see Colignatus (2014a).<sup>37</sup> It appears that Casey too has the attitude to be a judge about history, and to eliminate uncertainties and the null hypothesis.

The response by retired historian Anton van Hooff on an earlier draft of Colignatus (2014b) appeared to be scientifically improper.<sup>38</sup>

Hulspas didn't respond. He is no historian though he wrote a book on the Bible, see Hulspas (2006) that I discuss in SMOJ. He is astronomer and only a reporter for the Dutch edition of the New Scientist.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps he has no scientific obligation to respond since he does not seem to present himself as a scientist.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leontopolis>

<sup>31</sup> A statement by Tom Verenna alerted me to a link that I hadn't thought of, which goes to show my lack of knowledge in these things: "(...) has long been thought of as a metaphor for the Leviticus 16 atonement sacrifice for the sins of Israel (with Jesus as the sacrificial goat, while Barabbas is the scape-goat sent off in the wilderness)." Indeed, the traditional Yom Kippur celebration for the atonement of sins still has those two goats.

<http://tomverenna.wordpress.com/2013/03/04/a-new-theory-that-jesus-was-king-of-edessa-not-so-fast-mr-ellis>

<sup>32</sup> JLIV:320-322 mentions the calendar, but doesn't seem to regard it as important. Curious about this, I now found H. Stegemann, "The Library of Qumran" and some of his comments, e.g. p171. The original Temple cultus might use 364 days (somewhat Egyptian) while the rest of Jewish society used the Babylonian 354 days. I just log this now.

<sup>33</sup> One confessed a fear for numerology. A longer list of non-response to the Dutch edition EWVJ of SMOJ is here: <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/EWVJ/2014-05-04-Agnosme-wiskunde-Jezus.html>

<sup>34</sup> I already mentioned this webtext in Dutch: <http://www.frontaalnaakt.nl/archives/over-jezus.html>

<sup>35</sup> Email in Dutch: "(...) kan ik je verwijzen naar het boek van Maurice Casey, Jesus. Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths? (2014, Bloomsbury). Het is niet het perfecte boek, maar het maakt wel duidelijk waarom veel sceptische theorieën over het leven van Jezus overbodig zijn."

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.nrc.nl/handelsblad/van/2014/oktober/03/de-mythische-versus-de-echte-jezus-1424736>

<sup>37</sup> <http://boycottolland.wordpress.com/2014/05/12/review-of-maurice-casey-on-the-jesus-myth>

<sup>38</sup> <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/EWVJ/2014-04-28-Wetenschappelijk-wangedrag-Anton-van-Hooff.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.newscientist.nl/author/marcel-hulspas>

## Historians as judges over the past: Bias by favouring the alternative hypothesis

It is scientifically improper when a historian puts the uncertainty in the data aside and decides for others, as if he or she should judge how the past "really" would have been. We are reminded of the Von Ranke quote: "*Wie es eigentlich gewesen ist!*" - *how it really was.*<sup>40</sup> Perhaps that attitude might be acceptable for issues that don't matter much, like the introduction of the crinoline dress, if that really didn't matter much. History perhaps becomes tedious reading if every sentence contains the word "perhaps". But the elimination of uncertainty with respect to crucial questions cannot be regarded as scientific, such as about the historical Jesus.

At this point, I must refer to **Appendices A, B, C and D**, for discussions on the same topic: "historians as judges over the past".

SMOJ already has a longer discussion on Flavius Josephus (FJ) (37 - c. 100 AD). FJ had access to the Roman archives after 70 AD. My conclusion is that his *Testimonium Flavianum* on the existence of Christ however relied on Christian sources and didn't use independent ones.

The mentioned Appendices look at Tacitus, and now in the following we also consider Pliny and Suetonius. Observe:

"But the temporal order for the documents begins with Pliny writing around 111 AD, then Tacitus writing in the Annals around 115/116 AD and then Suetonius writing in the *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* around 122 AD."<sup>41</sup>

Let us consider the following causes of uncertainty with respect to the labels "Chrestos", "Chrestiani" and "Christiani" as they appear in those Roman reports. It is remarkable that a monk changed *Chrestiani* into *Christiani*, but perhaps he was only being helpful.

Was Pliny a source for Tacitus and Suetonius ? Pliny Ep. X 96 wrote:<sup>42</sup>

"(...) I judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of torture, from two female slaves, who were styled deaconesses: but I could discover nothing more than depraved and excessive superstition. (...) For this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread through the villages and rural districts; (...)"

Thus, when Tacitus wrote about a "most mischievous superstition" (*exitibilis supersticio*) (rather a "destructive superstition") he may well have taken both Pliny's "superstition" and the hindsight of the destruction of Jerusalem of 70 AD, and imposed this understanding upon the events of the fire in 64 AD.

Similarly, when Suetonius around 120 AD wrote about Claudius expelling the Jews from Rome in 49-53 AD - "*Iudeeos impulsore Chreste assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit*" - then these earlier texts by Pliny and Tacitus contribute to vagueness who or what that "Chrestus" was.<sup>43</sup>

Apart from Jesus Christ and his followers, alternatives are:

1. They might be the Jews. χρηστὸς = *good*, and might merely refer to the *Good Lord*. Acharya S<sup>44</sup> refers to ὅτι χρηστὸς κύριος in Jeremiah 33:11 (LXX 40:11).<sup>45</sup> See also Liddell & Scott.<sup>46</sup> This explanation gives a Roman precedent to expell Jews in relation to

<sup>40</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leopold\\_von\\_Ranke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leopold_von_Ranke)

<sup>41</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pliny\\_the\\_Younger\\_on\\_Christians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pliny_the_Younger_on_Christians)

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.vroma.org/~hwalker/Pliny/Pliny10-096-E.html>

<sup>43</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suetonius\\_on\\_Christians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suetonius_on_Christians)

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.truthbeknown.com/suetoniuschresto.html>

<sup>45</sup> [http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?b=Jer&c=33&v=1&t=RSV#s=t\\_bibles\\_778011](http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?b=Jer&c=33&v=1&t=RSV#s=t_bibles_778011)

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Dxrsto%2Fs>

their religion including circumcision. The shift from *Chrestiani* in Tacitus to *Iudeeos impulsore Chreste* in Suetonius is remarkable, however.

2. There is χρηστῆς = *usurer, profiteer*. *Chrestai* would be plural, and *Chrestiani* would be their minions and looters, rather than "followers". It is Carotta who advances this view and who links to modern Italian "far(e) la cresta" = "cream the top" = "steal, profiteer"<sup>47</sup> like modern "skimming". See also Liddell & Scott.<sup>48</sup> Carotta of necessity inserts an additional explanation how there can be a confusion between usury profiteers and property speculators in 64 AD and a religion (*exitibilis supersticio*) in 115 AD.
3. PM. Remember that Egyptian "krs(t)" still relates to "bury, burial", and that Rome had a sizeable population from the Orient who buried, while Romans themselves tended to cremate.<sup>49</sup> This however is an observation by this author and I have no idea how this fits in with linguistics and other sources. (And ironic: buriers who caused a fire...)

We see the conceptual error of desiring to judge also in the discussion by Anton van Hooff (2002) of the proposition by Carotta that it would be Julius Caesar who was the model for Jesus Christ. Van Hooff quotes Tacitus (about 56-117+ AD) on the Fire of Rome as evidence for the existence of Christians in 64 AD. Van Hooff refers to M.A. Wes but here I insert in italics the Tacitus quote from Perseus,<sup>50</sup> and see wikipedia for more discussion and links:<sup>51</sup>

"In this connection Tacitus [...] around 115 AD [...] explains from where christianity originated. *'Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus (...)' [source], in a paragraph that is accepted as authentic by all modern renditions of the Latin [sic]."*<sup>52</sup>

However, Van Hooff should have discussed the sources that Tacitus used. The sentence on Christ and Pontius Pilatus may well have been an intermission of later date.

It is historically warranted that Pontius Pilatus (PP) existed: there is a stone. The story of the New Testament borrows from historical time, presents events as real, which is the method in the Old Testament (while Moses and David are myths too).

As Roman administrator PP will have sent messages to Rome that will have been archived. Were those archives from 26-36 AD still available in 115 AD, and was the issue important enough for Tacitus to check? Or did Tacitus follow the explanation by the Christians themselves, so that he didn't use an independent source? Till we know better, the latter is more likely, while it might just as likely be an intermission of later date.

Suppose that Tacitus did find a report by PP. Would PP have told the same story as the gospels? PP couldn't report miracles since those don't exist. He would not have said that he crucified the Son of God. If the gospels have a historical backbone, he would have reported that this Jesus was a demagogue and that the Jewish leadership and people wanted him executed. With such a report, Tacitus could have been much more specific why the Christians

<sup>47</sup> [http://www.carotta.de/subseite/texte/jwc\\_e/reorient.html](http://www.carotta.de/subseite/texte/jwc_e/reorient.html)

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=xrhsth&l=a=greek#lexicon>

<sup>49</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman\\_funerals\\_and\\_burial](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_funerals_and_burial)

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:latinLit:phi1351.phi005.perseus-eng1:15.44> ." But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired."

<sup>51</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacitus\\_on\\_Christ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacitus_on_Christ)

<sup>52</sup> Dutch original: "In dit verband legt Tacitus [...] rond 115 nC [...] uit waar het christendom vandaan kwam. 'De naam is afgeleid van de Christus die tijdens het bewind van Tiberius door toedoen van de procurator Pontius Pilatus was terechtgesteld', zo vertaalt M.A. Wes de passage, die door alle moderne uitgevers van de Latijnse [sic] als echt wordt erkend."

must be despised. Now Tacitus only writes vaguely about the "most mischievous superstition". **Appendix A** at this point concludes: "Thus the lack of specificity suggests that Tacitus did not have an independent report such as from PP." However, this suggestion better is modified. It is not quite necessary for Tacitus to clarify the *exitibilis supersticio*. Earlier he had already explained his views on the Jews.<sup>53</sup> See also some other discussions.<sup>54 55 56</sup>

A more important observation is: "Tacitus was a member of the *Quindecimviri sacris faciundis*, (QSF)<sup>57</sup> a council of priests whose duty it was to supervise foreign religious cults in Rome, which as Van Voorst points out, makes it reasonable to suppose that he would have acquired knowledge of Christian origins through his work with that body. [67]"<sup>58</sup> This tends to blur the argument again:

- either this QSF had good records from PP 33 AD,
- or the QSF had no such records, and Tacitus relied on Pliny and Christian sources on the crucifixion by PP, and confused *Christiani* of 115 AD with *Chrestiani* of 64 AD,
- or there is a later insertion on *Christ* and *Pontius Pilatus*.

This perspective indeed leaves room for Francesco Carotta's suggestion of a confusion of *Christiani* in 115 with *Chrestiani* in 64 AD. Whatever we might think about his suggestion that Julius Caesar (JC) was Jesus Christ (JCh) - I haven't looked into that - the following point seems worth of attention.

Carotta draws attention to the text by Tacitus that some persons apparently furthered the Fire of Rome (once it had started) - whence it wasn't irrational of Nero to look for culprits:

"And no one dared to stop the mischief, because of incessant menaces from a number of persons who forbade the extinguishing of the flames, because again others openly hurled brands, and kept shouting that there was one who gave them authority, either seeking to plunder more freely, or obeying orders." Tac. An. 15.38<sup>59</sup>

Carotta:<sup>60</sup>

"One recognises by the symmetry of the punishments that Nero has here applied the Talion law: the incendiaries were burned and those torn to pieces by dogs can only have been the speculators, the 'bloodsuckers'. Therefore the word chrestiani here can only mean the chrēstai,<sup>61</sup> the speculators, as we have seen above in Suetonius' report on Claudius.[287] Then their characterisation too does make sense, namely, that they were 'hated by the people because of their outrageous acts'.

The late confusion of those chrestiani or chrēstai, of the speculators with the Christians, could have arisen because there were possibly Jews amongst the speculators who were punished. This fit the image of the Jews anyhow, all the more so, because at that time the Jewish rebellion was in the air. Hence the lines that immediately follow the above interpolation could refer to Jews, especially to a Jewish mafia of speculators, taken as a pars pro toto:

'The fatal superstition, which was at first suppressed, gained ground once more, not only in Judea from where this evil arose, but also in Rome, where all sorts of atrocities and infamies from all the world pour in and find a happy approval.'[288]

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.livius.org/source-content/tacitus-on-the-jews>

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/tacitus.html>

<sup>55</sup> [http://thedevineevidence.com/jesus\\_history.html](http://thedevineevidence.com/jesus_history.html)

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.livius.org/person/tacitus> and <http://www.livius.org/source-content/tacitus-on-the-christians>

<sup>57</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quindecimviri\\_sacris\\_faciundis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quindecimviri_sacris_faciundis)

<sup>58</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacitus\\_on\\_Christ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacitus_on_Christ)

<sup>59</sup> <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:latinLit:phi1351.phi005.perseus-eng1:15.38>

<sup>60</sup> [http://www.carotta.de/subseite/texte/jwc\\_e/reorient.html](http://www.carotta.de/subseite/texte/jwc_e/reorient.html)

<sup>61</sup> Anton van Hooff makes fun of this: *chrestai* (usurers) is surely a different word than *chrestiani* ("followers of usurers" ?), but overall a suggestion might be to translate *chrestiani* as "usurers and their minions". At this point in writing it is not clear to me whether this would be excluded by linguistics or other sources.

Hence these lines could be authentic, as the corresponding short version in Suetonius shows:

'The punishment of death was declared on the christiani, a race of humans with a new and objectionable superstition.'[289]

But it is also possible that they belong to the interpolation, because Suetonius is not independent of Tacitus and a prosecution of Jews is not recorded at this time.

Conclusion: If one follows this critique of the passages by Tacitus and Suetonius, then in the historical writings from the time before the Jewish war there is no Jesus, no Christ, and no Christians. And if one does not want to follow it, then it can at least be said objectively that Greek citations are missing, whilst indubitable Latin proofs do not appear until the second century and they concern only chrestiani or christiani, respectively: Chrestos or, barely, Christus—with no trace of the name Jesus."

### **Subconclusion before (reviewing) JLIV**

Nonsense about the historical Jesus can be debunked. It appears necessary to train historians better in the scientific method and decency.

This point had been made before JLIV appeared. That book may well be a product of neglect of H0 and a bias for H1. Still, I tended to have great respect for Lendering. Advancement in research is by looking at the arguments. Hopefully some comments w.r.t. JLIV will help its author and readers.

## **JLIV and its general objective**

### **A short outline**

See again the *Introduction* above on the main objective of JLIV. Remember its title: *Israel divided*.

JLIV gives a brief history of the Persians, Alexander the Great and the division of his conquest. JLIV then develops the story from 180 BC with the Hasmoneans and Herodians. Indeed, the story of Christ can only be understood from the period before Christ. SMOJ has this same outline, but looks deeper, with also ancient Egypt and the two kingdoms of both Judea ("proper" Jews) and Israel (Samaritans). It is awkward that JLIV tends to use Judea and Israel as equivalent, and perhaps a better title would have been *Judea and Israel divided*.

Readers new to the subject will much benefit from this discussion in JLIV. I already knew most, but some parts from sections on the internet, and it was a pleasure to read a more composed discussion from paper. I didn't know about the alternative Temple by Onias in Leontopolis,<sup>62</sup> and this seems to strengthen the argument for looking at relations with Egypt. Though I already knew this point too: I have grown more aware that Herod (Herodes) is a Greek name, and that the man himself was an Arab / Edomite supposedly from the "tribe of Benjamin", and thus by many Judeans not regarded as a proper Jew (from Judea).

JLIV then presents the common story of the Jewish groups. Flavius Josephus (FJ) mentioned three main groups *Sadducees*, *Pharisees*, *Essenes* that would be decent Jewish, and then there would be the unruly group, that wouldn't be decent Jewish and responsible for the troubles with the Romans. Part of that unruly group is messianism which is part of Judaism too. FJ had an objective of embellishment. JLIV:138 gives a table of the differences between the groups. One may compare this with a similar table in SMOJ:75 but with the innovation by the Christians: not to require circumcision.

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<sup>62</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leontopolis>

Subsequently JLIV develops the case of eschatology and messianism. After discussing the historical Jesus the path is clear for the Romans to destroy Jerusalem, and the rest is history.

JLIV argues that Jesus and the rise of Christianity can be fully explained from these Jewish roots, so that there is no need for Greek Platonism, Egyptian Book of the Dead or Serapis or whatever. SMOJ follows those essential Jewish roots - the lead character Jesus is Jewish after all - but provides the amendments that JLIV neglects: (a) that the NT is based upon the OT which already had been influenced in 600-400 BC by the Egyptian Book of the Dead and Pythagoras, (b) that the Jewish writers of the NT were Hellenised and Romanised - e.g. in their rejection of circumcision. Thus we require more than Israel to explain Jesus.

Curiously, JLIV doesn't have a list of literature: it is all in the footnotes, which makes it difficult to see the selection of sources. It is awkward that the footnotes are all in the back - a fashion from publishers who crave for a general audience that doesn't want to see sources. The index is some 32 pages: but in normal size letters and wide print. The index thus is much smaller than needed, and there were various occasions that I could not retrace a point that I had read (say on Onias) except from my own notes. I also have the impression, from recognising topics from the general discussion, that JLIV doesn't provide as much references as would have been useful. E.g. "thalita koum" p227 likely should refer to Casey, and p210-211 on the Testimonium Flavianum should refer to Meier - so that it is also clear that there is no reference to the critique.

### **Stated objective of *history* but implied position w.r.t. *Jesus***

JLIV does not state as an explicit objective to provide evidence that Jesus is a historical figure. Lendering decided already in 2001 that he is.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the rationale is: given the selected location and time window, Jesus is discussed as just one aspect of the whole history. I don't think that this is the proper approach. Proper is to distinguish two topics:

- (a) The origin of mankind, ancient history and the rise & fall of civilisations,
- (b) The origin of Jesus and Christianity and the claims of the major religions.

Clearly the second can be seen under the umbrella of the first, but it is better to mention it as a separate topic. If you don't distinguish these angles then you run into the problem of focus.

Recently, Lendering has given a bit more explicit attention to the 'mythicists', but now he presents it under the umbrella that it is merely an example of a general argument on the collapse of the historical studies on antiquity (e.g. by cutbacks in funds).<sup>64</sup> This again seems a confusion of goals. And a hidden appeal to relevance.

### **Inconsistency w.r.t. "*Relevance is the enemy of history*"**

Indeed, already in the "pre-publication" JLIV becomes inconsistent. He quotes J.P. Meier:

"Relevance is the enemy of history"

**and** has the cover text explaining that the book is **relevant** for understanding existing religions: which implies that he is his own enemy:

"Jona Lendering describes this period not only because it is important for still existing religions, but also as a subject that is important for itself."<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> W.r.t. an article by Meier on the Testimonium Flavianum he states in 2001: "This article settles the matter": <http://web.archive.org/web/20010411053425/http://www.livius.org/jo-jz/josephus/josephus.htm>

<sup>64</sup> Dutch statement: "(...) heeft de mythische Jezus in de eenentwintigste eeuw een comeback gemaakt, die mijns inziens illustratief is voor een veel ernstiger probleem: de instorting van de oudheidkundige disciplines." <http://mainzerbeobachter.com/2014/11/28/jezus-mythen-en-voorlichting-1>

<sup>65</sup> Dutch original: "Jona Lendering beschrijft deze periode niet alleen omdat ze belangrijk was [the cover of my book has "is"] voor nog bestaande godsdiensten, maar ook als een onderwerp dat op zichzelf van belang is." <http://www.athenaeum.nl/leesfragment/jona-lendering-israel-verdeeld>

A good strategy in writing is to not only try to convince your friends but also become your own worst enemy, and then try to convince yourself, before you might hope to convince others. (While a scientist assumes that those others are no enemies but only colleagues.)

As a motto "*Relevance is the enemy of history*" has a nice flavour in this time of cutbacks on academic research, with the abuse that everything must become 'relevant'. On the other hand, "*Relevance is the enemy of history*" remains a non-sequitur. People are interested in history because it is relevant to know about history. People are interested in the question whether Jesus was a historical figure because it is relevant to know whether current claims by Christian churches are based upon artificial creation - and mutatis mutandis for the (earlier) Hebrew Bible or the (later) reference to a prophet Jesus in the Quran.

It makes a difference whether Jesus was a preacher and healer who was only later depicted as God himself, or whether he was deliberately created as fiction. One might add: psychologically it makes a huge difference for many people. In the first case one might argue that there still was a 'divine spark'. In the second case people feel cheated.

Those who state "*Relevance is the enemy of history*" (J.P. Meier, J. Lendering) may be worse enemies of history, because it is a non-sequitur, which shows that they cannot think properly. Relevance is a very good motive to study history, and to study history we must rely on scientific methods.

### **Emphasis on *Halakha* rather than *Aggadah* (but not focusing on circumcision)**

SMOJ p15 explains:

The OT has no separation of church and state. It seems that this is actually what Jesus proposes. But the separation already exists in the explanation of the OT: *Halakha* is explanation for the law and *Aggadah* is explanation for the belief.

JLIV claims that common explanations about the historical Jesus and the separation of Judaism and Christianity focus on the Aggadah: the theological differences about whether Jesus was really the Son of God. He shows that other Jews on occasion were presented as messiahs and were called sons of God, while they still remained within the framework of Judaism and also were recognised by other Jews as still Jews. That Jesus expected that the end of time and the Kingdom of God would be soon, would still be within the parameters of Judaism. The claim that Jesus rose from death would be regarded by other Jews as silly rather than as blasphemy (my interpretation of JLIV). Who focuses on the Aggadah can only explain the Big Separation by the council of Nicaea in 325 AD<sup>66</sup> in which Jesus was declared not only the son of God but also God himself. The latter however does not fall within the location frame of Israel and the time frame of JLIV.

JLIV claims to present somewhat of an *alternative*: namely to give a nudge of more attention for the *Halakha*. If this really would be an alternative then this would amount to a serious criticism of Bible Studies up to now, since how could one neglect the *Halakha*? However, JLIV doesn't quite want to load the blame of neglect on say 100 years of serious research. Instead he only wants to provide a nudge. The nudge however is sufficient to bring the Big Separation within his frame of time and location, and then claim some novelty for JLIV. However, it isn't really novel, since J.P. Meier already called for more attention to *Halakha*.

According to JLIV the gospels were *not* created in say Alexandria or Rome after 70 AD but Jesus was historical. He was crucified around 33 AD, and the Big Separation started because of his teachings of a different *Halakha* than was common Judaism.

JLIV:135 provides a parallel in the separation by the *Teacher of Righteousness* to Qumram from high priest Jonathan.<sup>67</sup> JLIV describes a process in which the difference of opinion on

<sup>66</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Council\\_of\\_Nicaea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Council_of_Nicaea)

<sup>67</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teacher\\_of\\_Righteousness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teacher_of_Righteousness)

say 20 points of Halakha develops into a deeper rift when more theological issues are added upon:

"The issue is that the topic of discussion consisted out of a set of points of Halakha that by themselves were not that important, and that there was disagreement about the question whether this was worth to have a crisis. The separation occurred before those involved had thought about the question what now really had been the cause of the differences. Perhaps it was only in the second instance, when they reflected on what had happened, that the members of the sect realised that they accepted, alongside the Law of Moses also the books of the prophets [footnote], while those who proceeded to call themselves sadducees, were of the opinion that only the Law was canonised." (JLIV:135)

It is a pity that JLIV neglects my proposition that the major difference between Judaism and Christianity arose after 70 AD basically because of circumcision, and that other elements were added in similar fashion, to make it seem as if the cause wasn't so mundane. Priests may emphasise how noble they are - "when people are poor then we don't charge them" - but the true message is "we earn income by charging everybody else".

Indeed, circumcision is an element of Halakha, and thus I would be inclined to agree with JLIV on the importance of Halakha. However, the Christian replacement of circumcision by baptism is the Pauline interpretation - and it seems that Jesus still remained in the Judean fold. When JLIV discusses the dissenting views of Jesus on the Jewish Halakha then it is a rather disappointing collection - with a curious admission of this by JLIV:228, while it is a pity that JLIV does not explicitly lists them in a clear table. JLIV suggests that Jesus was against divorce 'because the End of Time was near anyway' which is perhaps intended as a pun. Overall, the suggestion of a nudge towards more attention to the Halakha is not convincing.

#### **JLIV doesn't give proper place to the destruction of Jerusalem & Temple**

I fail to see why the destruction of Jerusalem & Temple would not be sufficient to explain the Separation of Judaism and Christianity. Indeed, circumcision is important, but at a secondary level after the main event. A dog needs a tail to wag, but let us please not forget about the dog itself.

In my analysis the fall of the Temple caused the need for a deliberate action to save the OT for prosperity. To emphasise the old belief in Yahweh would run the risk of suppression by the Romans. The development of Rabbinate Judaism was an experimental continuation of the Pharisees and not guaranteed to succeed - and unattractive for those like the Sadducees who rejected the Talmud. But let us indeed look at those groups.

#### **The distinction in Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes and others**

Some points on this:

- Above, I already referred to the tables reviewing the differences, JLIV:138 & SMOJ:75.
- JLIV suggests that the distinction between Sadducees and Pharisees originated in this period after 180 BC, with also a part going to Qumran with the Teacher of Righteousness. In my impression it must have been a much older division, given the tasks and the composition of the Sanhedrin: Sadducees for service in the Temple (sacrifices, Moses law, no contact with death people) and Pharisees for services for the people (circumcision, weddings, funerals). Qumran might indeed be new. I do miss here the mention of unconventional approaches to the Teacher of Righteousness.<sup>68</sup>
- JLIV:136 finds it "disturbing" (Dutch "verontrustend") that Josephus presents the groups as the Jewish equivalents of the Greek schools in philosophy: *Epicurians, Stoics and Pythagoreans* (in above order). Some of the unruly sects might be Cynics. JLIV's problem with this Greek parallel is that it downplays the very Jewish nature of the groups. Van

<sup>68</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alvar\\_Eleg%C3%A5rd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alvar_Eleg%C3%A5rd) for the suggestion of an identification as Jesus, and see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Eisenman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Eisenman) for a suggestion to identify him as James, "the brother of Jesus".

Praag (1969) however points out that Zeno of Citium (Cyprus) had an Oriental / Phoenician and perhaps Jewish background.<sup>69</sup> SMOJ mentions the influence of Pythagoras and Plato on the Therapeutae of Philo Judaeus - also found in some Essenes. Overall it is useful to be aware of the similarities and differences, the causes for the war, and that Jesus was a Jew. (PM. The Stoic notion of "goodness" reminds us of chrestos = good again.)

- It is important to see that the Sadducees were rooted in the Temple and the sacrifices there, and lost their roots in 70 AD, while the Pharisees still had their Talmud and could develop into the Rabbis. Sadducees will have split: those who disappeared, those who kept circumcision and became Rabbis, those who still rejected the Talmud and rewrote the OT into the NT, ... and other possibilities.
- JLIV:161 curiously states about FJ: "His greatest omission is that he nowhere discusses the eschatological expectations that existed at that time and the belief that there would come a messiah."<sup>70</sup> However, SMOJ:65 states: "In his description of the Jewish War of 66-70 AD that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, Flavius Josephus holds that the Jews caused it all themselves: "But now, what did the most elevate them in undertaking this war, was an ambiguous oracle that was also found in their sacred writings, how, about that time, one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth." (War, VI.5.4)"<sup>71</sup> Perhaps JLIV means to argue that FJ did not discuss it as much as he should have done: e.g. explain that the Jews felt so oppressed by the Romans that they sought recourse ? But of course FJ was editing history (and later the writers of the gospels took his texts to write their stories so that they seemed historical).

The discussion in JLIV ch. 6 on messianism is relevant indeed, since it clarifies that the messianism in the story of Jesus need not have caused a rift between him and the Jewish fold. The division between the appeasers and the zealots was political. JLIV:188 observes that both FJ and the Mishna hardly discuss messianism, either because of its lack of relevance for mainstream Judaism or to avoid drawing Roman attention to it. JLIV:189 then concludes that the Separation must have been caused by something else: the Halakha. But that is a non-sequitur. The Separation was caused by the destruction of Jerusalem. The dividing consequence for the Halakha (no circumcision) was derivative.

As everyone, JLIV observes that Jesus Christ and his sect are hardly mentioned by FJ. An explanation would be that FJ apparently did not want to emphasise the messianistic cults that would allow a trace to what still existed after 70 AD. It is only one of the interpretations. JLIV follows Meier in the correction of the Testimonium Flavianum, which correction eliminates some inserts by later monks, but leaves the conclusion of a historical Jesus. JLIV doesn't mention the criticism however.

Gary Goldberg is rather convincing that the inserts can be based upon some version of the Emmaus Narrative.<sup>72</sup> Meier's reasoning is a *petitio petitii* or a begging of the question. See the longer discussion in SMOJ. Krijbolder (1976, 1999) (unfortunately with wrong speculations on the Turin Shroud)<sup>73</sup> called the lack of mentioning not very surprising since much of Jesus would later well be modelled after FJ himself.<sup>74</sup>

## Pseudo-history

JLIVs selections and methods generate at various points what we might call "pseudo-history". I am not a historian but when I spot inconsistencies or gross assumptions then I might at least question what is presented to me.

<sup>69</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeno\\_of\\_Citium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeno_of_Citium)

<sup>70</sup> Dutch: "Zijn grootste omissie is dat hij nergens ingaat op de destijds bestaande Eindtijdverwachtingen en het geloof dat er een messias zou komen."

<sup>71</sup> [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_War\\_of\\_the\\_Jews/Book\\_VI#Chapter\\_5](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_War_of_the_Jews/Book_VI#Chapter_5)

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.josephus.org>

<sup>73</sup> <http://nazoreer.wordpress.com>

<sup>74</sup> I do not have clear now what features are mentioned by Krijbolder's book but let me mention some features: the dealings in Galilee, the presumed death and 'resurrection' from the cave in Jotapata, the impact of standing on the walls of Jerusalem and admonishing a surrender before the final apocalypse of the destruction of city and Temple.

### **Fire as revenge for fire ?**

Let me give an example from JLIV:281: "Vespasianus and Titus had their march of triumph. The Arch, that was erected as usual in such festivities, stood in the curve of the horse racetrack, across the Jewish district. In this way the new rulers instilled the Jews of Rome with the awareness that the Jewish sect of Christians was responsible for a terrible fire [Rome in 64 AD] and that the legions had taken revenge with an equally terrible fire in Jerusalem [in 70 AD]." This relies on the earlier abuse of Tacitus on Nero and the "Chrestians" - see above. Common sources let the Jewish revolt start in 66 AD.<sup>75</sup> Would it really take the Romans two years to root out the culprit Christians in Judea ? Instead, the common story is that the rebuilding of Rome required Nero to raise taxes everywhere, and that when the Roman tax collectors knocked on the doors of the Temple in Jerusalem, they forgot their respect and fell for greed, which sparked the uprising. This more corroborated story also supports the analysis that the "Christian" interpretation of Tacitus is false. Where is the historian who dares to make the latter merely logical inference ?

### **A "real prediction"**

Or, what to think about this statement, JLIV198: "Also the fact that the evangelist expects that the End of Time will arrive soon, suggests that there hadn't passed a sufficient amount of time to discover that history continued."<sup>76</sup>

That statement on JLIV198 is made in the context that Mark lets Jesus "predict" the destruction of Jerusalem. Mark 13:2: "Jesus replied, "Do you see these huge buildings? They will certainly be torn down! Not one stone will be left in place."" JLIV198:

"That 'not one stone will be left in place' is clearly untrue, as everyone can determine at the Wailing Wall. [ftnt to Mark 13.2] The prediction therefor must date from before 70 AD."

Firstly, this point is made in Casey (2014) that Lendering reviewed, and there is no reference here. Secondly, Colignatus (2014a) reviewed Casey (2014) and showed that the argument doesn't stand. We shouldn't overuse the notion of 'silly' but the destruction of Jerusalem and Temple is so massive that it is rather silly to hold that the prediction didn't come true. It would be a give-away to predict "except for the Wailing Wall". In terms of "prediction after the fact" Mark 13:2 qualifies, and is likely from after 70 AD. I hope that some historians step forward to confirm this and help us to get rid of this silly argument by Casey and Lendering.

### **Massacre of the Innocents**

JLIV:83 & 200 discusses the Massacre of the Innocents. He states that Herod could have used his German bodyguard to do so. Unfortunately he does not refer to his own short article Lendering (2013)<sup>77</sup> that discusses the option that these could be Batavi<sup>78</sup> (from Holland). If he had referred, the reader would also have seen my comment<sup>79</sup> (following Krijbolder (1976, 1999)) below that article, that, the massacre in Matthew might well be a (hidden) allusion to the uprising 5 or 4 BC that is described by Josephus, Josephus attributes it to the fact that Herod put an image of a golden eagle (the *Roman* eagle !) on the Temple gate which provoked adherents of Moses Law that there should be no false gods. Josephus mentions that the leaders of the revolt and their followers are massacred. We can understand that the

<sup>75</sup> Unreliable of course: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Jewish%E2%80%93Roman\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Jewish%E2%80%93Roman_War)

<sup>76</sup> JLIV really states this, in Dutch: "Ook het feit dat de evangelist verwacht dat de Eindtijd snel zal aanbreken, suggereert dat er nog niet voldoende tijd was verstreken om te ontdekken dat de geschiedenis verder ging."

<sup>77</sup> <http://www.frontaalnaakt.nl/archives/kindermoordenaars.html>

<sup>78</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batavi\\_%28Germanic\\_tribe%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batavi_%28Germanic_tribe%29)

<sup>79</sup> Dutch: "Van hoger hand mag ik dit bericht doorgeven: [http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthias\\_ben\\_Theophilus\\_I](http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthias_ben_Theophilus_I) Herodes toonde zijn aanhangelijkheid aan de Romeinen door de Romeinse adelaar aan de Tempel te bevestigen. Strenggelovigen kwamen in opstand en enkele jongelingen verwijderden het beeld weer. Enkelen werden opgepakt en gedood, anderen uit dezelfde schoolklas werden verbannen en gingen naar Alexandrië en de Joodse gemeenschap daar. Bethlehem staat voor "Huis van het brood", en staat voor tijd van zaaien van gerst en tarwe, of metaforisch de nieuwe leer. Zie <http://www.frontaalnaakt.nl/archives/over-jezus.html>"

leaders were also teachers and that various followers were their young students - some of whom fled to Egypt. Now we get into serious spaghetti:

- (a) JLIV does not allow for a *systematic* metaphorical reading of the Bible. In arbitrary fashion it is sometimes history and sometimes metaphor, and historians are the judges of this.
- (b) Matthew's report is presented as only one *historical* source, and he restates that 'one source is no source' and thus dismisses also the possibility of metaphor.
- (c) On p83 right after claiming this, he actually discusses the incident reported by Josephus, without linking the two issues. He thus also neglects my comment.
- (d) He properly describes that the Law of Moses doesn't mind the portrayal of people and animals, but only forbids their worship. Then JLIV:84 states: "(..) we have no idea, not even a beginning of an idea, of what now was so offensive about a golden eagle in Jerusalem." <sup>80</sup>
- (e) JLIV thus doesn't allow for a *systematic* critical reading of Josephus. In arbitrary fashion it is sometimes history and sometimes propaganda, and historians are the judges on this. In this case, it is comforting to the mind to assume that Josephus presents history as it was, and since it is a single source, it can be neglected.
- (f) The reader may now surmise that Josephus may not have mentioned that Herod might have done a little bit more than just put up an eagle at the gate. If there was an uprising, it may well have been that he also intended a worship of a Roman god or even the emperor himself in the Temple, or that the protesters reacted to such a perceived intention.
- (g) This does not imply that we now have two sources for such an incident. It may well be that Matthew took the core of his metaphor from Josephus.

### ***Provenance in Nazareth***

This is like the application of formulas of magic: "(...) provenance from Nazareth, that has been attested four times and is so much in conflict with the prophecies that also the criterion of embarrassment applies. That Jesus came from Nazareth is reasonably 'hard' as a historical fact." (JLIV:213) <sup>81</sup>

But see the discussion on Q that the gospels copy each other, so that they cannot be regarded as independent. And what is the embarrassment when one of the gospels explicitly refers to a prophecy ?

Subsequently JLIV:213-214 discusses that the archeological record of Galilee contains no Roman earthenware. He draws the inference of a resentment to the Romans and "hence" a conservative attitude that would also show in religious view. The rise of a Jesus from this district would be understandable.

However, Jesus might have come from Galilee even when there were Roman shards. Or Jesus might not have come from Galilee in either case. Why present something as "evidence" when it is not ?

There is also an alternative explanation why Galilee features in the gospels. We mentioned Krijbolder (1976, 1999) on the link to FJ - and remember FJs command and exploits in Galilee. There is a book by Atwill in 2006 with an addition in 2011 that I haven't read (yet), but the reviews mention interesting arguments w.r.t. Galilee, again seen from the option of deliberate creation. <sup>82</sup> If I understand that book properly then Titus would be Jesus the son of God (with his campaigns in Galilee) and FJ would be first Saul then Paul.

Indeed, we only have Flavius Josephus's (FJ) own words how he switched sides from the Jews to the Romans and saved his life. Supposedly he told Vespasian that the latter would become emperor, and that the Jewish predictions on the coming of a ruler of the world and messiah from Israel applied to him. It is curious that FJ is critical of messiahs in other cases.

<sup>80</sup> Dutch: "(...) we hebben geen idee, zelfs geen begin van een idee, van wat nu zo aanstootgevend was aan de gouden adelaar in Jeruzalem."

<sup>81</sup> Dutch: "(...) herkomst uit Nazaret, die viervoudig is geattesteerd en zozeer in strijd met de profetieën dat ook het criterium van gêne van toepassing is. Dat Jezus uit Nazaret kwam, is als historisch feit redelijk 'hard'."

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.amazon.com/Caesars-Messiah-Conspiracy-Flavian-Signature/product-reviews/1461096405>

But, once Vespasian had become emperor - and thus a god to the Romans - it might not be illogical for Vespasian to ask FJ whether the Jewish creed had more predictions for him, or to ask FJ to, please, tell his Jewish countrymen that they should worship him as their ruler and messiah. By implication, FJ would have had the task to create Christianity, as Vespasian clearly wasn't circumcised. Apparently smart FJ managed to save the Old Testament and convince Vespasian that he shouldn't aspire to become king of the Jews himself, but let a fictitious Jesus do so. But this is only one of the scenarios.

[Addendum December 20: See the first section above now, where I discuss some reviews of Atwill's approach by Richard Carrier and others.]

When I buy a book by a historian on a subject like JLIV in 2014 I would expect a discussion of the existence of this approach, and possibly mention of arguments to reject it, rather than a complete neglect.

### **JLIV on the highest command: honour God and love thy neighbour**

Let us quote JLIV:230<sup>83</sup> on the crucial message by Jesus: what is the highest command. It is at this point that his book gives a serious blow to my respect for Lendering as a historian.

SMOJ:62 recalls Euclid of Alexandria who axiomised geometry. Jesus like Euclid now axiomatises the Law of Moses by reducing it to two key axioms. See SMOJ also on the distinction between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law.

JLIV:230 however doesn't see the clash between Jewish and Greek thought, suffers from misconceptions, and argues in convoluted manner by inserting assumptions so that the conclusion doesn't really differ from those assumptions.

<i>JLIV:230</i>	<i>My comments</i>
One particular discussion forms a notable exception: the discussion with the scholar. There namely is no conflict.	The conflict is that Jesus is lured into a trap. By not responding properly he would be exposed as a fraud.
His opponent asks him what the highest command is. Jesus recites the Shema: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one", and adds that people should love God and subsequently that the second highest command is that people should love their neighbour as themselves. This is a quote from <i>Leviticus</i> . The scholar agrees, summarises it in his own words, and closes with saying that the love for God and the neighbour mean more than all sacrifices. After a compliment by Jesus, he leaves, after	<p>Shema.<sup>84</sup></p> <p>SMOJ:62 refers to Matthew 22:34-40, who explains that Jesus is being tested, and who leaves out the Shema.</p> <p>(A common idea is that Mark was written for Romans and that Matthew was written for Jews - so that Matthew would not have to recite the known Shema.)</p>

<sup>83</sup> Dutch original: "Eén discussie valt uit de toon: de discussie met de schriftgeleerde. Er is namelijk geen conflict. Zijn gesprekspartner vraagt hem naar het belangrijkste gebod, waarop Jezus het Sjema aanhaalt: 'Hoor Israël, de Heer is onze God, de Heer alleen', toevoegt dat de mensen God moeten liefhebben en vervolgens het op een na belangrijkste gebod noemt, namelijk dat mensen hun naaste moeten liefhebben als zichzelf. Dit is een citaat uit Leviticus. De schriftgeleerde stemt in, vat het in zijn eigen woorden samen en rondt af met de waarden dat het liefhebben van God en de naaste meer betekenen dan alle offers. Met een compliment van Jezus neemt hij afscheid, waarna Marcus vertelt hoe Jezus uithaalt naar de schriftgeleerde. [noot] Dit verhaal kan niet door Marcus zijn bedacht, want het past niet tussen de twistgesprekken en het maakt de verwijzen die Jezus aan de schriftgeleerden maakt, ronduit bizarre. Marcus vertelt bovendien iets wat hij niet weten kan. Hij geeft althans nergens in zijn evangelie blijk van kennis van de farizese uitlegtechnieken, terwijl we hier een voorbeeld zien van de zogeheten *gēzérá sáwá* ('hetzelfde onderdeel'), een van de zeven door Hillel erkende vormen van tekstinterpretatie. [noot] Hierbij wordt geprobeerd de betekenis van een woord in een zin te verduidelijken door het te vergelijken met hetzelfde woord in een andere zin. (Het lijkt op wat in de hedendaagse geesteswetenschappen wordt aangeduid als de 'paradigmatische methode'). In dit geval wordt het liefhebben van God verduidelijkt door te verwijzen naar het liefhebben van de medemens en wordt de liefde voor de medemens uitgelegd als het liefhebben van God. Deze wijze van uitleg veronderstelt heel specialistische kennis, waarvan onaannemelijk is dat Marcus die bezat. Daarom is het aannemelijk dat de anekdote vrij oud is, wat overigens niet meteen wil zeggen dat ze authentiek is. Mocht ze het zijn, dan wordt wel begrijpelijk waarom de mensen destijds zo verbaasd waren over Jezus' kennis van zaken. [noot]"

which Mark tells how Jesus lashes out to the scholars. [ftnt: Mark 12.28-34, with quotes from Deuteronomy 6.4-5 and Leviticus 19.18 and JLIV:216]	
This story cannot be invented by Mark, for it doesn't fit between the conflictual arguments and it makes the accusations by Jesus of the scholars squarely bizarre.	Why can't Mark invent stories that with some thought would be inconsistent ? The conflict is obvious, and Matthew helped by stating it. It is consistent with the accusations: they tried to trap him. That the scholar knew the answer (Jesus is not original in the Euclidean reduction of Mosaic Law, Jesus Sirach is earlier) would be evidence of hypocrisy.
At least he doesn't show anywhere in his gospel any knowledge about the textual techniques used by the Pharisees, while here we see an example of the so-called <i>gēzērā sāwā</i> ('the same part') one of the seven forms of text interpretation accepted by Hillel. [ftnt]	The whole gospel likely is a product of application of those techniques. JLIV inserts an assumption rather than evidence.
This technique tries to clarify the meaning of a word in a sentence by comparing it with the same word in another sentence. (This looks like what is called the 'paradigmatic method' in the modern humanities.) In this case the love for God is clarified by referring to the love of one's neighbour and the love for one's neighbour is explained as the love for God. This manner of explanation presupposes very specialised knowledge, of which it is unlikely that Mark had this.	We are dealing here with the highest command of Jewish religion and law. We can assume that understanding it belongs to the core of education. It is rather silly to assume that Mark, who is supposed to be able to write or dictate these texts, would be uneducated.
Therefor it is likely that the anecdote is very old, which moreover doesn't mean to say that it would authentic.	JLIV:229 (the former page) quotes Hillel who was asked the same question and answers: "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn." <sup>85</sup> The gospel thus only paraphrases the incident with Hillel. (Who was not original either, see Jesus Sirach.) It is strange that JLIV:230 doesn't link up to JLIV:229. Hillel died 10 AD. Educated people at the time of Mark would recognise the old anecdote. It would be silly to presume that they thought that Jesus was reliving the same old anecdote. They would understand the <i>double entendre</i> : that Jesus didn't really exist, and was only a metaphor of the Jewish creed that was under attack by the Greeks and Romans.
If it would be authentic, then it becomes understandable why the people at that time were so amazed by Jesus' knowledge of issues. [ftnt]	(a) It would only be authentic under above assumption on Mark: the assumption is presented as a new conclusion. (b) Jewish scriptures that were intended to be read for audiences tend to have two layers: one layer for who have been educated and can appreciate the <i>double entendres</i> , and one layer for children so that they don't get bored. A comment on the amazing knowledge belongs to the latter. A <i>double</i>

<sup>84</sup> Morning and evening prayer, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shema\\_Israel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shema_Israel)

<sup>85</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillel\\_the\\_Elder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillel_the_Elder)

	<i>entendre</i> still remains that Gentiles can be impressed by the wealth in Jewish religion.
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Lendering has it wrong on the key command to honour God and love thy neighbour. He claims to look at the Jewish origins of Christianity but doesn't know yet how to read Jewish texts. The separation between Judaism and Christianity didn't come about by the declaration by Nicaea in 325 that Jesus was God, but by the destruction of Jerusalem & the Temple and the wish to create a Christianity without circumcision - while the teachers of Judaism stick to circumcision and still don't think that Jesus has existed.

### ***JLIV and the historical method***

#### **A short outline**

JLIV claims to present history so that Jesus comes along naturally as a historical figure. JLIV sees no need to explicitly discuss the critique on the supposed existence of Jesus. JLIV however still observes a need to discuss the 'historical method'. (JLIV:339 refers to Mason (2011) that I read afterwards, basically agreeing.) The critique on Jesus is collected under the denominator: they don't understand science. This approach is awkward, since it means:

- (1) Jesus is presented as a historical figure while there is serious critique
- (2) Particular arguments on Jesus are not dealt with
- (3) Critique leveled on the 'historical method' isn't dealt with
- (4) Authors with such critiques are collected in one group, and collectively put down as not to be taken seriously. (A group has been crying 'woolf', and anyone new who cries 'woolf' belongs to that group.)

I find it incorrect that Lendering does not deal with various points of critique that I have alerted him to, even at various occasions: SMOJ itself, an external weblog text,<sup>86</sup> my review (2014a) of Casey (2014) and draft text for Skeptical Colignatus (2014ab), and some texts on my own weblog now reproduced in the **Appendices A, B, C, D**. Apparently Lendering doesn't mind publishing JLIV not mentioning that critique (apart from even studying it). Part of the 'historical method' is apparently neglect - or collecting it into one group that can be put down as not to be taken seriously.

JLIV does not live up to the scientific method in general. I presume that the reader has indeed read the first section above on that, and has been vaccinated against the approach in JLIV. Let us now look at some main arguments in JLIV that deviate from the scientific method.

#### **'One source is no source'**

The juridical working hypothesis 'one piece of evidence is no evidence', that we mentioned above in reference to Franklin (2001), returns in the 'historical method' and is presented in JLIV as 'one source is no source'.

A critical attitude with respect to sources is in principle recommendable, as it for example reminds us that FJ may not be reliable, see JLIV:256.

But much of history would disappear if we would not be allowed to use single sources. There are also proposals for 'criteria for authenticity' (JLIV:206-207) that might be useful in general and that might be tried for such single sources. Such criteria rely on psychology and cultural customs, and thus are surrounded by much uncertainty.

I have not tried to keep a register when JLIV applies the criterion 'one source is no source' or when he applies criteria for authenticity, or when the latter still is used to turn a single source into something still useful. My suggestion is that JLIV does this himself, he is the historian. I

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<sup>86</sup> <http://www.frontaalnaakt.nl/archives/over-jesus.html>

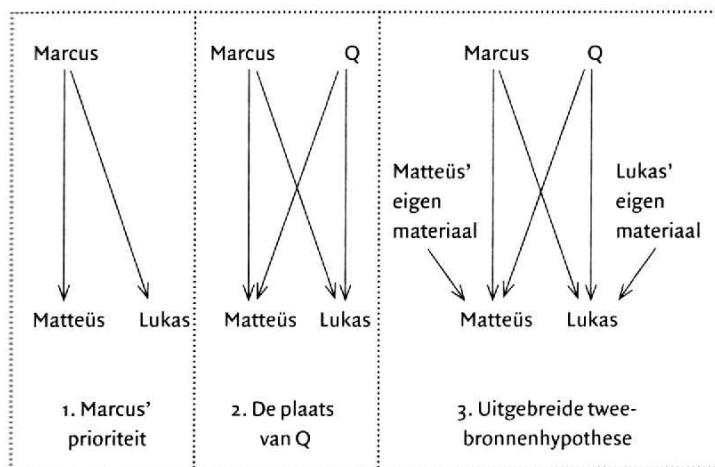
fear that he isn't entirely consistent in this yet. It would be interesting to see whether the 'one source is no source' method would support a bias into one direction. For example, forgeries and misinterpretations in FJ and Tacitus can be promoted to 'sources' so that these would 'corroborate' the gospels, while, given the non-existence of Jesus, it is more likely (a) that the gospels used the general history by FJ and Tacitus, and (b) that later monks inserted Jesus into the texts. But since we don't have eye-witnesses of the latter, it becomes somewhat harder to stick to the null-hypothesis that Jesus didn't exist. It is awkward that JLIV doesn't mention the latter possibility. Readers are presented with a one-sided view, and the very uncertainties that exist here are eliminated.

### Abuse of Q as a 'source'

JLIV197-202&294 presents the common hypotheses of the 'priority of Mark' and the 'two sources of Mark and Q', see Figure 1. The gospels of Matthew and Luke would be written independently. The origin consists of both Mark and a "document Q" (German *Quelle*) that contained more sayings of Jesus. Unfortunately, Q is lost to us, but scholars have been busy to reconstruct it from comparing the various available documents.<sup>87</sup>

A critical reader will observe: The existence of Q is very fortunate since now there is a second source, and the 'historical method' makes the gospels available to write history.

**Figure 1: Priority of Mark. Two sources Mark & Q. Own material from Matthew and Luke (Copied from JLIV:197)**



However, let us apply some logic. Please remember that I am an econometrician and teacher of mathematics and that I wrote a book on logic. This is no appeal on authority but an emphasis on an invitation to use your logical faculties. If necessary use pen and paper:

Eliminate Matthew and Luke as copies. Since Mark and Q do not overlap, they are each single sources. Application of 'one source is no source' causes their elimination. The gospels evaporate.

In other words: using **both** Q **and** the rule 'one source is no source' turns history into magic.

<sup>87</sup> For Q: use as a portal [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Q\\_source](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Q_source) "Link to the Q project:  
<http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~kloppen/qpget.htm>: "The Sayings gospel Q contains some of the most memorable of Jesus' sayings. It is thanks to Q 11:2b-4 that we know the Lord's Prayer. Q presents it in a more original form than what we use in our liturgy today. (We use Matthew's revision of the Q Prayer: Matt 6:9-13). Q also preserves for us the certainty of the answer to prayer (ask, search, knock, for a caring Father does provide, Q 11:9-13), the beatitudes (Q 6:20-23), the love of enemies (Q 6:27-28, 35c-d), turning the other cheek, giving the shirt off one's back, going the second mile, giving, expecting nothing in return (Q 6:29-30), the golden rule (Q 6:31), the tree known by its fruit (Q 6:43-45), indeed most of what we think of as the Sermon on the Mount—and more: storing up treasures in heaven (Q 12:33-34), free from anxiety like ravens and lilies (Q 12:22b-31), taking one's cross (Q 114:27), losing one's life to save it (Q 17:33), parables of the mustard seed (Q 13:18-19), the yeast (Q 13:20), the invited dinner guests (Q 14:16-23), the lost sheep (Q 15:4-7), the lost coin (Q 15:8-10), the entrusted money (Q 19:12-26)."

The Q-hypothesis is intended to solve the 'problem' that there are similar parts in Matthew and Luke that aren't in Mark. That there are two gospels of Matthew and Luke suggests that they satisfy the rule 'one source is no source'. But the very fact that they apparently copy some Q, reduces that original source Q to a unique source again - and hence 'no source'. The fallacy in the Q-hypothesis is that it forgets about that last step. But it may also be that the Q-hypothesis doesn't quite stick to the rule 'one source is no source' - so that JLIV disinforms us about the true 'historical method' (or overly employs it to show that history also has its methods comparable to physics).

If this is not clear, check the steps:

- 1) Matthew and Luke might also insert their own material - which for each would be single sources and would have to be discarded. (Accepted by JLIV:200.)
- 2) Material in Mark that finds no copy in Matthew and Luke cannot simply be assumed to be in Q too, since we don't have it. That material must also be eliminated.
- 3) Only the overlap in Matthew and Luke is relevant, if we can indeed assume that they worked independently.
  - a) If this overlap cannot be explained by Mark then that would logically be equivalent to assuming Q. However - and Lendering doesn't see this - then there would only be a single source Q, merely copied by Matthew and Luke, and it must be eliminated.
  - b) Hence only those points survive that are in all three gospels.
  - c) But in that case both Matthew and Luke are based upon only one source, namely Mark. Hence there is only one source. Thus the gospels are no source.

Lendering doesn't present this logic to his readers. Very likely he doesn't see it. My hypothesis is that he isn't interested in it and has merely followed the mainstream. Please consider: *this concerns major sources for your topic of history!* To neglect testing the logic on validity ought to be regarded as a serious offence. Please note that I didn't do much testing myself, but I am no historian: as explained my objectives are different.

One point is, that Mark and Q at least might agree that Jesus exists. This is a tricky contention. We don't have Q. Those sayings might not mention Jesus explicitly. The editors might only have attributed them to Jesus as well. Always beware of good reasons to be critical about your evidence.

There are some more considerations at this point, but they distract from the main line, and thus are put in **Appendix E**. The question on the deliberate creation of the gospels likely cannot be settled by looking into the interdependence of the gospels. Still, mainstream analysis neglects the possibility of deliberate creation while it would be useful to keep account of this possibility.

Overall, JLIV presents the mainstream view of the priority of Mark and the use of Q, but creates a false sense of certainty. The improper 'historical method' creates its own Jesus. Suggesting that Q would be a 'second source', presenting assumptions / analysis as facts, creating page after page with 'information' that is no real information or relevant, draws attention away from the central issue that Jesus didn't exist, and readers may succumb by fatigue to the idea that he would.

### **Neglect of an alternative explanation for Q, as seen from the logic of overlap**

From **Appendix E** we at least come away with the notion that the gospels can overlap, and that there is a subgroup that may be called Q of points that are in Matthew and Luke and not in Mark. "Love thy enemy" is a remarkable aphorism - or a creative application of "love thy neighbour" in a situation of foreign occupation. Who sticks to the notion that 'Jesus is a Jew and thus used only Jewish sources' opts for Q as a Jewish source. But there is also the option that Romans targeted a more submissive creed, which however is neglected by JLIV. See the discussion above of the 'historical provenance of Jesus from Nazareth'. This alternative interpretation does not imply that Q had a Roman origin. We might get the same effect when say FJ starts with writing Mark and later extends with Luke, and later condenses again into Matthew. See that **Appendix E** for the comment that overlap doesn't say very much by itself.

## **Unbalanced criticism on the 'mythicists' (realists)**

JLIV might say that it 'answered' to critique, but in this manner it is no real answer. Since JLIV has little discussion, it is necessary to use other texts by Lendering (available on the internet). I categorise them in points i - iv.

### ***i. No academic training in history of antiquity or New Testament Studies***

Some overlap between the various scientific disciplines is unavoidable. Such overlap be known as the 'turf war'. (a) As an econometrician I meet non-economists who make statements about the economy and whom I tell that they would benefit from studying economics. (b) As a teacher of mathematics I meet also mathematicians who have not really studied didactics, and I may ask them to do so. (c) Historians on economics or the education of mathematics might make statements without properly studying those subjects.

Thus, historians of antiquity have a good point on requiring a sound background.<sup>88</sup> However:

(1) The remark doesn't apply to me, since I do not intend to write history. I have explained my intentions and those of SMOJ in the introduction. Looking at *given* historical events from the angle of education of mathematics allows comments which don't change those events. When Jesus reduces Mosaic Law to two axioms, then it can be enlightening to see a parallel to the Greek influence of Euclid giving an axiomatic development of geometry. Relevant is the step to higher abstraction, not only in geometry but also in morality. Drawing attention to that parallel does not change anything of the events given in standard books on history. If SMOJ contains historical error, please tell me which. Yes, I am aware that history writing also consists of giving interpretations, but again I do not intend to write history, and if some historians see it fit to adopt some of my comments then this would be merely interesting.

(2) On the existence of Jesus, I have become alarmed by the errors in logic and methodology that I have observed in texts by historians. See **Appendix B**, that observes that a discussion on the 'historical method' develops into a discussion on statistics. Well, this is a subject that I have taught in. By consequence I ask questions. It is a non-sequitur to say that I should study for a doctorate in history to find those answers, since apparently the historians already cause those questions. The proper response for historians is to reply to those questions, or ask another statistician whom they trust to tell them the same thing, and then reply.

(3) The criticism of lacking a sound background might apply to other authors - who might indeed have the objective to write history. See this page by Neil Godfrey at Vridar<sup>89</sup> who also provides some information on the (non-) academic backgrounds of critical authors on Jesus. ("Names in bold black hold doctoral qualifications in either biblical studies, religion or ancient history. Names in bold maroon are prominent names in other areas.") Godfrey made that table in response to Casey (2014) who asserted - apparently falsely and without checking the data (but he was severly ill at that time) - that 'mythicists are fundamentalist because they have a fundamentalist upbringing anyway'. Obviously the Vridar list of qualified historians is fairly short, but let us hope that the discussion is not reduced to bean counting.

(4) I have looked at some of those non-academic sources and found a plethora of alternative interpretations, some of which seem to make sense in some points. When the story of Jesus is looked at from the angle of mathematics education, then students looking on the internet will also meet such interpretations. It is better to mention and discuss them in rational manner than neglect them. The story of Atlantis is too good not to tell it, and it is advisable to educate students how to deal with that kind of story. If SMOJ would be unbalanced in this then I am open to comments why so.

(5) For example, Lendering: "More troublesome is that the mythicists do not know antiquity well. It requires a great deal of familiarity with ancient literature to recognize the significant

<sup>88</sup> in Dutch also here: <http://mainzerbeobachter.com/2014/12/03/jezus-mythen-en-voorlichting-4>

<sup>89</sup> <http://vridar.org/whos-who-among-mythicists-and-mythicist-agnostics>

signals and the noise." <sup>90</sup> Here he gives a particular example that seems fair - but I cannot judge of course. This however should not distract from the errors on the existence of Jesus. It is remarkable that Lendering himself doesn't quite understand the Jewish *midrash*.

### ***ii. Academic sources behind pay-walls versus the junk on internet***

JLIV follows Casey (2014) in the lament about the 'mythicists' - rather realists - predominantly on the internet and not in the academia. JLIV - and also Lendering (2014b), his critical review of Casey - points to the fact that modern research is behind a pay-wall. Free internet sources are either outdated (from pre-modern scholars, with outdated 'facts') or not from scholars at all.

This may be so. It remains that summaries of that modern research at the academia are available for outsiders to read, and that those show a bias that provokes a justified protest.

When Lendering advises me to take the pay-wall and read Casey (2014) and I do so, and this book appears not to be scientific but mostly an accumulation of biases and non-sequiturs, see my review Colignatus (2014a), then Lendering should not be surprised that the justified protest continues.

That pay-wall is inappropriate anyway. Those researchers are paid for by mostly public money and there is no reason why those results should not be available for the general public. With summaries that the public can understand (often also people with university education but in other subjects). Clearly, researchers are underpaid and put in a lot of personal time from internal motivation. The academia should also reward efforts for communicating with the general public. But it are the academia who are responsible for co-operation with the commercial publishers who create that pay-wall. Hence, don't blame the protesters but blame the academia, both for misguided research and for hiding.

Lendering himself would be excused: his university position was cut back and he has created Livius.org also to maintain his research. His internet presence suggests that he isn't hiding. Here only the criticism of quality applies.

### ***iii. The fallacy: if Jesus didn't exist then hardly anyone in antiquity existed***

JLIV <sup>91</sup> presents the argument: The 'mythicists' apply such strict criteria for the existence of Jesus, that, if we would apply those same criteria for other people in antiquity, then hardly anyone survives. There is no reason to treat Jesus differently than others.

This is fallacious for these reasons:

- (a) It misrepresents the critique. The arguments against the existence of Jesus are not special. It is on a common base that we may regard it as historical that Alexander the Great existed and Jesus didn't.
- (b) Jesus as a figure himself is special. Like Serapis or Santa Claus are special. There were more reasons in the past to create false evidence for Jesus than for Alexander. It is not unreasonable to have some additional criteria for cases like this.
- (c) It might be useful to look at the statistical decision theory, discussed above. Perhaps the following isn't done in the writing of history yet, but then it may be done implicitly, since it is merely logical. My question for the historians is to make it explicit. The choice of the probabilities  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  depend upon the risk that one is willing to run. The risk comes from multiplying the probabilities with the importance of the events. This is the 'relevance' that Meier & Lendering warn about. If something is not so important then we can allow a large value of  $\alpha$  (the probability to reject  $H_0$  when it is true). If something is very important then we

<sup>90</sup> Last link. Dutch: "Lastiger is het als mythicisten de antieke context niet goed kennen. Er is een stevige vertrouwdheid nodig met de oude literatuur om daarin de significante signalen en de ruis te herkennen."

<sup>91</sup> In Dutch also here: <http://mainzerbeobachter.com/2014/12/03/jezus-mythen-en-voorlichting-4>

would tend to require a low value of  $\alpha$ . In other words: *relevance matters*. For example, Julius Civilis might not have existed. A few texts might be fabricated. We may however reject the null-hypothesis (that he didn't exist) with a wider margin, since it doesn't matter so much. If the Batavi revolted in 69-70 AD (on instigation of Vespasian) then they might have had a local leader, whatever his name. In the case of Jesus we would be stricter. I suppose that when historians would reflect on their methods that they would indeed find a pattern like this.

#### **iv. Simplicisms**

Serious criticism on the 'historical Jesus' runs the risk of an (over-) simplification, such that it becomes a strawman, and can be taken down in a few strokes. JLIV can run this fallacy in passing, but, since that book is not targetted at discussing alternative views, let me refer to a weblog text where Lendering collects the following points.<sup>92</sup> In that weblog text he claims not to discuss mythicism but the general challenge to the discipline of history of antiquity (like cutbacks, quality and communication to the general public). I take the liberty to still protest against the caricature that he creates of 'mythicims' (actually realism). My point is that 'history of antiquity' is already broke on Jesus, and Lendering isn't helping much on this topic.

1. *No rational person believes sources that contain miracles.* This is silly: a single miracle need not invalidate the rest of a text. It all depends upon the rest. The kind of miracle might still provide some indications. Miracles might be metaphores.
2. *Sources that contradict one-another are unreliable.* This is silly: they cannot both be true, but a wrong one (possibly both) might indicate that something happened anyway.
3. *Jesus is predominantly mentioned in Christian sources.* This is silly: how could such a situation invalidate other sources ? When there are predominantly blue cars in the garage, why would that imply that there could not be red cars ?
4. *The earliest Christian literature doesn't describe Jesus's life.* This is silly: Why would serious students of the mythicist option not be aware of alternative explanations ? (a) If he existed then some aspects would be known by word of mouth (oral tradition) and not immediately relevant to write down. If Jesus is portrayed as 'man turned God' then there might be reason not to emphasize all the sordid details of the human phase. (b) If Jesus didn't exist then he was a theological concept and such details were not the most urgent.
5. *Jesus's acts look like those of heathen gods.* Here Lendering however agrees. He gives an example: Egyptian goddess Isis breastfeeding Horus as the icon that became a model for Mary & baby Jesus. Doing so, he however reduces the seriousness of the parallels.

This continues on the second weblog entry.<sup>93</sup>

6. An elaboration on adequate background of 'mythicists', and the use of old sources, not linking to Vridar.
7. There is an example on Mitra that I don't know about: Mitra (Vedic), Mirtha (Zoroaster), Maitreya (Buddhist), Mithras (Greco-Roman).<sup>94</sup> It is a pity that Lendering does not provide a link to the source of the example that he deconstructs, because also in 'mythicism' there are degrees in quality.
8. An elaboration on the existence of only few written sources: *Paul writes very little about the life of Jesus.* While we already mentioned the alternative views in point 4, it is useful to mention: (a) Remember that Paul already treated Jesus as the Son of God. If Paul is historical (there are various scenarios that Paul must be seriously doubted too) then this divinity is no later invention of the Church. Hence in Paul's lifetime a normal person would be very interested in details about God. But Paul turns Jesus into a cardboard character. (Paul hammers on: Believe in the crucifixion of Christ and your sins will be redeemed. This is not intended as a simplification but as a rough indication. I understand that theologians have a rich literature on Paul.) (b) The library of Alexandria was destroyed, so we will not know what all was written about other gods like Alexander for comparison.
9. *The stories about Jesus look like those of the Jewish Bible and are derived from those, thus Jesus has not existed.* Lendering calls the first a correct observation and the latter a

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<sup>92</sup> <http://mainzerbeobachter.com/2014/11/28/jezus-mythen-en-voorlichting-1>

<sup>93</sup> <http://mainzerbeobachter.com/2014/11/30/jezus-mythen-en-voorlichting-2>

<sup>94</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitra>

wrong inference. Indeed, when simplified like this it indeed becomes silly. Students of texts will know about text-analysis, of which the Jewish midrash is an ancient form,<sup>95</sup> see SMOJ and see JLIV:314-317. I suppose that the researchers in the above list by Neil Godfrey / Vridar are aware of the complexities of text-analysis. If Lendering has caught any of those of making the silly inference that he presents here as an example, he should point that out.

This continues in the third weblog entry.<sup>96</sup>

10. A development of point 1 on miracles above.
11. A curious point on the age of remaining manuscripts.
12. A development of point 3 above: non-Christian sources are FJ 94 AD, Pliny 110 AD, Tacitus 115, Suetonius 120 AD (approximate dates here from wikipedia<sup>97</sup>). We discussed that above. Lendering points to the *Chrestos* / *Christos* iotaism, but note that this would cause: that earlier proper forms of *Chrestos* could be written as *Christos* and not conversely.
13. A development of the fallacy *If Jesus didn't exist then hardly anyone in antiquity existed*, now for the example of a slave called Eunus.
14. The fallacy discussed above: "Even if they would not possess the gospels and only the four named sources (Josephus, Pliny, Tacitus and Suetonius), then the historians of antiquity would regard Jesus as a historical figure."<sup>98</sup> The fallacy here takes the form of assuming that these texts can be assumed independent, which cannot be done.
  - (a) If there were no gospels, then likely there would be no Christianity, no forgery in FJ and Tacitus, likely no worship that Pliny reports upon, and thus no report to be taken over by Tacitus and Suetonius.
  - (b) If Jesus existed then he might be mentioned perhaps once, and he would be reduced to one of the many names like Theudas, Claudius Civilis and so on. His existence would not matter except perhaps for the context in which he would be mentioned.
  - (c) If Jesus did not exist then he would not be mentioned, and Lenderings inference is definitely invalid for this option.
15. There is a convoluted sentence that requires elucidation; "Voor het moment (...) bestaan."
16. Mark and John are agreed that Jesus was crucified by Pilate: but John copies Mark.
17. Lendering agrees that one can discuss the 'historical method' - but not just now. This is convoluted. His own simplicisms block his discussion. The criticisms on the '*historical Jesus based upon the historical method*' have been targetted at inadequacies in that 'historical method'. Now would be the proper time to answer to that criticism. To present silly simplicisms and delay a response on that method is no proper manner to answer.

This continues in the fourth weblog entry. This entry and the overall argument however have been discussed above (see i-iii).

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<sup>95</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midrash>

<sup>96</sup> <http://mainzerbeobachter.com/2014/12/01/jezus-mythen-en-voorlichting-3>

<sup>97</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suetonius\\_on\\_Christians#Other\\_Roman\\_sources](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suetonius_on_Christians#Other_Roman_sources)

<sup>98</sup> Dutch: "Zelfs als ze niet zouden beschikken over de evangeliën en alleen de vier genoemde bronnen (Josephus, Plinius, Tacitus en Suetonius) hadden, zouden oudheidkundigen Jezus beschouwen als historisch figuur."

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion is also put into the abstract.

Lendering (2014) "Israël verdeeld" (Israel divided) - henceforth JLIV - claims to present a history of the Jewish world in 180 BC - 70 AD. The book has mixed features of a scholarly book and a book to popularise historical findings for a general audience. JLIV frames Jesus as a historical figure. JLIV also discusses the historical method but not the criticism about it for its application to Jesus. The author adheres to the motto: "Relevance is the enemy of history" (J.P. Meier). The focus on the Jewish world in JLIV implies an emphasis on that Jesus was a Jew - and thus marginal to the Greek and Roman world. The implied argument is: Why would Greeks and Romans worship a Jew as their God ? JLIV does not explicitly discuss other scenario's than a historical Jesus. JLIV basically neglects the arguments of serious authors who analyse that Jesus did not exist as a historical figure, and thus is not even a legend but a myth. There are various scenarios how a Jesus as a mere idea could have come about. A possibility is that a sect of Hellenised Jews came upon the creation themselves. Another possibility is deliberate deception. JLIV does not put the Greek and Roman conquest of Israel en Judea at center stage that can explain this deception. The creed around Jesus might have been created by the Romans to pacify the religiously fanatical Jews. It is only after some centuries and by more processes that the Roman Empire eventually adopted the creed as its own, as a twist of history. For some readers it may matter whether Jesus really existed. For scientists it doesn't matter but for them science and truthfulness matter. The relevance that Meier and Lendering refer to is that people feel cheated and scientists feel distressed by religious authorities and 'scholars' who distort truth. To understand JLIV on the historical method and JLIV's response to the criticism on the historical Jesus, the readers of JLIV are not well served by JLIV itself. For this, one must look at other texts by Lendering. While Lendering may present JLIV as his position and answer, that position and answer isn't there, while what is presented elsewhere fails. Potential readers of JLIV are advised to wait for a second revised edition. Science can progress when authors are free to develop their argument but it is part of the process to respond to criticism.

## **Appendix A. Tacitus is too vague on Jesus too**

Weblog, April 23 2014 <sup>99</sup>

My book *The simple mathematics of Jesus* (2012) referred to the *Testimonium Flavianum* <sup>100</sup> (TF) since Flavius Josephus (FJ) was a Jew born in Jerusalem in 37 AD and was present at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. He is as close a historical source as we can get on the historical Jesus. The gospels of course are partial to the issue. My conclusion is that the TF is unreliable as well so that it cannot be used to say that there was a historical Jesus. The argument requires some pages plus an appendix and it leads too far to redevelop it here. The conclusion remains that it is more reasonable to assume that the gospels were created in an effort possibly in Alexandria to syncretise Jewish, Greek and Roman faiths, and that there was no historical Jesus.

Of course there were numerous faith healers and preachers at that time, but to say that there was one unique individual who gave rise to the development of the gospels with their theological message, lacks evidence. Saying "there was a Jew" is somewhat meaningless.

Given the argument on the TF, I stated that the argument on Tacitus was similar (on page 87). Today I had a discussion with a student of Tacitus who hasn't seen the argument on the TF. So perhaps it might be a good exercise to develop this too.

Tacitus (about 56-117+ AD) writes in his *Annals* around 116 AD on the burning of Rome in 64 AD:

"Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind". (wikipedia <sup>101</sup>)

Apparently most historians accept that this proves the existence of a person called Christ and his crucifixion. Wikipedia refers to Robert van Voorst, <sup>102</sup> professor of New Testament Studies at Western Theological Seminary, in Holland, Michigan.

But let us deconstruct the statement. We can accept that there were maldoers & culprits [see the correction in the footnote] in 64 AD, since that fire and persecution are so big that these will not be easily be made up. <sup>103</sup> Tacitus does not say however where he got his information on the crucifixion. The Christians will have told about it since this is their story. Thus it is possible that Tacitus relied on the Christian story to explain where their name comes from, and this is not an independent source.

<sup>99</sup> <https://boycotttholland.wordpress.com/2014/04/23/tacitus-is-too-vague-on-jesus-too>

<sup>100</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephus\\_on\\_Jesus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephus_on_Jesus)

<sup>101</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacitus\\_on\\_Christ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacitus_on_Christ) See ftnt 36 above. 15.44 "ergo abolendo rumori Nero subdidit reos et quaeſitissimis poenis adfecit, quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Chrestianos appellabat. auctor nominis eius Christus TIBERO imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat; repressaque in praesens extiabilis superstitione rursum erumpebat, non modo per Iudeam, originem eius mali, sed per urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrocia aut pudenda confluunt celebranturque. Igitur primum correpti qui fatebantur, deinde indicio eorum multitudo ingens haud proinde in crimen incendii quam odio humani generis convicti sunt."

<sup>102</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Van\\_Voorst](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Van_Voorst)

<sup>103</sup> In April -December this text had "Christians". Writing in December 2014 I must correct: There need be no proof that there were Christians involved in the Fire of Rome 64 AD. A scenario is that the NT was only composed (rewritten from the OT) after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Jesus might personify Jewish belief, his crucifixion might symbolise that destruction of Jerusalem by Romans, and his resurrection might symbolise the rise of his church. The writing might be done by the Flavians perhaps even with Josephus or Hellenised Jews in Alexandria (or other).

The Christian story mentions Pontius Pilatus (PP) and while Tacitus may have checked that there was such a figure indeed, it is not guaranteed that he located PP's archives and found mention of said crucifixion. Writing in 116, the year 30 was 86 years in the past. It is dubious that such an independent source still existed. The crucifixion was important for the Christians but not for the Romans. But Tacitus doesn't mention his source and thus we simply don't know.

But there may not even have been a crucifixion. The Christian story may have been constructed. In that case Tacitus must have relied on the Christian story for sure.

Suppose that Tacitus did find a report by PP. Would PP have told the same story as the gospels ? PP couldn't report miracles since those don't exist. He would not have said that he crucified the Son of God. If the gospels have a historical backbone, he would have reported that this Jesus was a demagogue and that the Jewish leadership and people wanted him executed. With such a report, Tacitus could have been much more specific why the Christians must be despised. Now he only writes vaguely about the "most mischievous superstition". Thus the lack of specificity suggests that Tacitus did not have an independent report such as from PP.<sup>104</sup> [But this need not be so. Tacitus had other sources on foreign religions and might have felt no need to be specific.]

We do know that there is no verified independent eye witness report from the years 0 - 30 AD (plus or minus) that allows to check what the gospels write or claim about Jesus. We only have such indirect texts.

The main conclusion is that the evidence on Jesus has been lost in the mist of time. We cannot determine whether there was such a person or how the story came about. The evidence can be explained by assuming a preacher who inspired the gospels, but can also be explained by deliberate syncretism in for example Alexandria.

Syncretism had already been done with respect to the god Serapis,<sup>105</sup> so Alexandria had had some practice. We see deliberate construction as well for Apollonius.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, we might try to develop a "scale of syncretism", a tool to measure the effort to create a hero, saint or god. On that scale, Jesus may rank the highest, as the son of the creator of the universe and the saviour of all our souls. This position is another argument for a syncretic rather than a historical origin.

The student I had this discussion with is dr. Anton van Hooff,<sup>107</sup> a historian on antiquity and chairman of an association of atheists ("free thinkers").<sup>108</sup> He is an atheist who, because of Tacitus, still accepts the historical existence of a preacher called Christ who was crucified. When I presented him with the reasoning above, he rejected it. He excludes the syncretic explanation and refuses to consider reading *The simple mathematics of Jesus* for a closer look at the argument. This shows a closed mind. This is unscientific and will cause him to misinform others like his fellow "free thinkers". So much for the "open mind" in Holland (the country).

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<sup>104</sup> But this need not be so. See the body of the text for this revision.

<sup>105</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serapis>

<sup>106</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollonius\\_of\\_Tyana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollonius_of_Tyana)

<sup>107</sup> <http://www.skepsis.nl/carotta.html>

<sup>108</sup> [http://www.devrijegedachte.nl/?page\\_id=7137](http://www.devrijegedachte.nl/?page_id=7137)

## **Appendix B. Historical judgement on Jesus and the sieve of realism**

Weblog, April 24 2014 <sup>109</sup>

A judge must decide whether the accused is guilty or not. Must a historian decide whether Jesus existed or not ? Or can a historian live with uncertainty ?

Shouldn't the historian emphasise the uncertainty, rather than guess at a verdict ?

This is a serious problem. On the issue whether there was a historical Jesus or not, we see that some historians arrive at a judgement. They in fact eliminate the uncertainty that they had exposed before. They behave like judges, which isn't their role.

There is a difference between people trained in *alpha* or *beta*\_educations. See C.P. Snow and the clash of two cultures,<sup>110</sup> between those who read Shakespeare and those who read quantum mechanics. My background is econometrics, say *gamma*, though the degree in teaching of mathematics gave me a MSc title too. With people in law and history, economists e.g. can use the method of *Verstehen*,<sup>111</sup> like introspection. With the physicists, we econometricians use hard mathematics and statistics. A tantalising question is whether gamma could be accepted as a bridge between alpha and beta. Would they accept such a bridge ?

Let us look at a judgment. The Dutch legal system originally condemned Lucia de Berk<sup>112</sup> as a serial killing nurse. She claimed to be innocent but spent almost seven years in prison and suffered a disabling stroke because of severe trauma, before she was released after much a do. The key role was for MD Metta de Noo – Derksen and her brother and philosopher of science prof. dr. Ton Derksen who exposed errors in the evidence and the trial. A key supporting role (supporting but still key) was for various professors like econometrician Aart de Vos<sup>113</sup> and mathematical statisticians like Richard Gill of Leiden who explained that the court had been advised by crummy experts on statistics. My own paper may be found here.<sup>114</sup>

Let us compare this with the 'historical method'.<sup>115</sup> Historians not only reason like judges but they may feel that they must expound a verdict too, and thus they can be wrong on two counts. Note that I don't use wikipedia as evidence but as a portal to look for the original scientific sources.

The historical method gives an algorithm that Sherlock Holmes might use to perform his forensic art. That the dog didn't bark is evidence too. Fine. This isn't as complicated as econometrics.

At the end of the wikipedia article we see some simple statistics. Now this is interesting. I encountered a historian who implied that I didn't understand the historical method. When I look at the historical method, I encounter statistics again, that is part of my training. Don't historians know this ? Don't they know that econometrics is an empirical science ?

I met another historian who apparently cannot live with uncertainty, and feels the need to expound a verdict. Anton van Hooff concludes that there is a historical Jesus.<sup>116</sup> This is curious. He behaves as a judge, while a scientist would explain the uncertainty of the data.

My suggestion is a sieve of realism:

<sup>109</sup> <https://boycottholland.wordpress.com/2014/04/27/historical-judgement-on-jesus-and-the-sieve-of-realism>

<sup>110</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C.\\_P.\\_Snow#The\\_Two\\_Cultures](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C._P._Snow#The_Two_Cultures)

<sup>111</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verstehen>

<sup>112</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucia\\_de\\_Berk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucia_de_Berk)

<sup>113</sup> <http://www.feweb.vu.nl/nl/afdelingen-en-instituten/econometrie-en-OR/afscheidssymposium-aart-de-vos/index.asp>

<sup>114</sup> <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/R2/2007-07-19-Colignatus-LdB-Correlation.pdf>

<sup>115</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical\\_method](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_method)

<sup>116</sup> <https://boycottholland.wordpress.com/2014/04/23/tacitus-is-too-vague-on-jesus-too>

Most evidence points to the likelihood that Jesus never existed but was created as a mythical figure to flesh out the gospels. Thus there simply cannot exist any evidence that he ever existed. Thus, if a historian claims that there was a historical Jesus, and comes up with a piece of evidence, then he or she should also look for alternative explanations that destroy that evidence. Clear evidence would only surface if there are no alternatives. For example, when Tacitus mentions the crucifixion by Pontius Pilatus he might merely use the statements by the Christians themselves. There is no proof that he used another source, whence the evidence evaporates.

Up to now, these historians don't work like this. They behave like judges but in fact they conceal the uncertainty.

PM. In that wikipedia article (retrieved april 27 2014): "McCullagh sums up, "if the scope and strength of an explanation are very great, so that it explains a large number and variety of facts, many more than any competing explanation, then it is likely to be true."" This is right, but the error would be to decide from "*likely to be true*" to "*true*". There still is uncertainty, so keep it there.

Indeed the wikipedia article continues with "(1) In thousands of cases, the letters V.S.L.M. appearing at the end of a Latin inscription on a tombstone stand for Votum Solvit Libens Merito. (2) From all appearances the letters V.S.L.M. are on this tombstone at the end of a Latin inscription. (3) Therefore these letters on this tombstone stand for Votum Solvit Libens Merito." (willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow) Thus, we note that the error is committed of going from likelihood to truth. Now, what is the evidence for point (1) ? You only have the letters and no statement on paper affixed to the stone what they stand for. Or does (1) express that such stones are found on cemetaries and that such an inference is safe for inscriptions found there ? If we grant (2), the error in (3) is that the historian switches from probability to certain truth. Perhaps that particular stone concerned Victor Simplissimus who expressed his love for Lucia M.

The latter is just a simple example of risky reasoning where it doesn't matter much. In the case of Jesus it does matter.

## **Appendix C. Why rewrite the Old Testament into the New ?**

Weblog May 14 2014. <sup>117</sup>

The story of Jesus in the New Testament contains many elements from the Old Testament. Reading Maurice Casey's 2014 book - see the former entry with my review <sup>118</sup> - I was amazed to see that "*love thy neighbour as thyself*" already occurs in Leviticus, in exactly the same words. Such rehash is actually endemic. Some authors hold that the NT is basically just the OT, rewritten and summarised. I just read this other review <sup>119</sup> of a book by fr Thomas Brodie O.P. who claims this too. Apparently Brodie's book is subject to criticism again by scholars but that is not the point right now.

The tantalising question thus is: Why rewrite the OT into the NT again ?

When the OT is already available around the year 0, why the effort to rehash it ?

**Reason 1:** The OT is a big book and a summary is always useful. This is actually not a strong reason, since the OT would originally only be studied at the Temple in Jerusalem and then in full. But when Greeks and Romans knocked on the door and wanted to know what was going on, one can image that many didn't want to read all of it.

**Reason 2:** The OT locates events and places in a somewhat fixed past. It gradually becomes outdated. Readers want to relate to current events and places, with Greeks and Romans. Hence the need for something new but it should not differ from the old message.

**Reason 3:** In particular, when Judaic society is under threat by Greeks and Romans, defence is easier when it is possible to refer to a short summary that contains the main ideas that need defence.

Reason 3 is already mentioned in my book *The simple mathematics of Jesus* (SMOJ) (2012). Namely, the OT book *Wisdom of Jesus Sirach* <sup>120</sup> contains lists of proverbs selected from the OT that help students to focus on its message without having to memorise the whole OT. This book has been used by the Catholic church since antiquity to educate its priests, and is also called the "church book". It is included in the Catholic Bible but not in the Protestant Bible. The Sirach book is paradoxical: it wants to protect knowledge about the OT against the onslaught of goy influence, but it selects exactly a goy method to do so, by summarising the OT into mere proverbs.

SMOJ observes that the NT presents a Jesus who mainly speaks in proverbs, and suggests that our Jesus actually got his name from the book of Jesus Sirach, since proverbs with a storyline are easier to remember than just a list of proverbs. A *quote* of Jesus (Sirach) could be changed in to *citation* of Jesus (Joshua).

The OT is often opposed to the NT as "an eye for an eye" versus "love thy neighbour". This thus appears to be a wrong opposition. The change attributed to Jesus occurred already long before his time, but admittedly not so clearly stated as the NT does.

**Reason 4:** After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the Romans would regard the OT as quite dangerous, since it culminates into the book Daniel that was linked to the uprisings since 66 AD. Pharisees used not only the OT but also the Talmud and thus could turn into Rabbinic Judaism. Sadducees who used only the OT had no way to go, but those who survived the destruction could rewrite the OT into a NT that gave Caesar what was Caesar's, with messages of peace and double entendres.

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<sup>117</sup> <http://boycottholland.wordpress.com/2014/05/14/why-rewrite-the-old-testament-into-the-new-q>

<sup>118</sup> <http://boycottholland.wordpress.com/2014/05/12/review-of-maurice-casey-on-the-jesus-myth>

<sup>119</sup> <http://www.mythicistpapers.com/2013/03/21/thomas-brodie-pt-1>

<sup>120</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sirach>

Thus, there are ample reasons to expect deliberate text editing. Who regards the NT as a historical account will be surprised by Thomas Brodie's book but it is more reasonable to expect an explanation as he gives. Without a historical Jesus, the texts must have originated elsewhere, and deliberate rehashing of the OT because of above reasons makes ample sense.

Does this affect Christianity and the belief in God ? It need not on content but would on form. You would still love your neighbour as yourself, and the cross on the church towers would become a symbol of an idea instead of a symbol of a supposed historical event. The crucifixion is a literary way of expression that Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, as this method of execution is particularly Roman. Devout Christians have nothing to fear from new understanding. Those who doubt have a better focus on the issues why they doubt. Overall, these insights are only beneficial.

There is the old distinction between the original teachings by Jesus and the Pauline interpretation. The distinction between the circumcised (Simon the Rock) and the non-circumcised (Paul). Since many Christian Americans are circumcised, they should adhere to the Judaic laws as in the teachings by Jesus, and observe the Sabbath and so on. However, inconsistently, many follow the Pauline interpretation, which is that it is sufficient to just believe in Jesus Christ. Given the above, the Pauline interpretation evaporates since there is no historical Jesus Christ to believe in. Thus the inconsistent Americans have even more reason to return to the Judaic laws of the OT as summarised in the NT. No Friday night parties no more, and the sale of pork and bacon should drop dramatically.

A sensible response however would be to stop circumcision, as it is mutilation, and to see how an enlightened understanding of religion and morality can help mankind.

## **Appendix D. Estimating the number of Jesuses**

*See the discussion with spreadsheet and graphs at my weblog, June 6 2014.*<sup>121</sup>

The confusion by historians Van Hooff and Lendering is: there are sufficient indications that there existed a man called Jesus, that he preached in Judea and surroundings, and that he was crucified. The following is part of the deconstruction.

We can set up a calculation that there may have been 10 of such crucified preaching Jesuses. Above confusion does not provide any evidence that indicates a link between such a Jesus to the origin of Christianity.

Thus, the proposition "there was a historical Jesus" has a confused and tendentious meaning. It is more likely that such Jesus with a link to the gospels did not exist.

See the weblink and excel sheet for a rough calculation. I would like to see a less rough calculation by an established historian.

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Numbers (rough idea only)</i>
(a) There were Jews in that time and place.	One million Jews seems too much. We are on the safe side with half a million men and women in the age-group 20+, and 200,000 males in the age-group 20-50 in a single year. Looking at uniquely different individuals over the whole period 20-75 AD, we would find 658,333 males in that age-group.
(b) Many Jews were called Jesus (or Joshua).	With 1.2% of boys circumcised as Jesus, there are 7815 relevant Jesuses.
(c) Some of them are preachers.	With the same percentage of preachers as in the USA today, there are 4 to 38 preaching Jesuses.
(d) Some will have been crucified. This may have happened more often, though the numbers given by Josephus might be wrong by a factor 10 because of some error in translation.	When minimally 1 has been crucified, then the percentage ranges between 25% and 2.6%. But when we accept 25% then we may apply this also to the number of 38, and arrive at 10 crucified preaching Jesuses.

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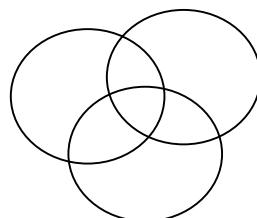
<sup>121</sup> <http://boycottholland.wordpress.com/2014/06/06/how-many-jesus-were-crucified-q>.

## Appendix E. Hypotheses about the dependence of the synoptic gospels

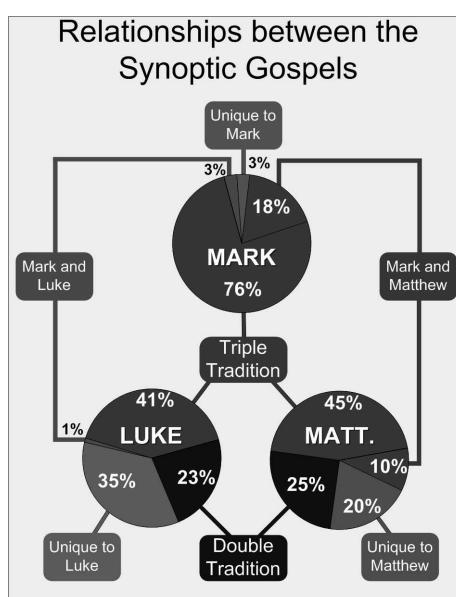
The proof for deliberate creation need not be found from considerations about which gospel was first. Overall, it is difficult to see how overlap would indicate anything. Addition and deletion are common edits. It would rather depend upon other issues: linguistics, content, context. Such need not indicate anything about deliberate creation.

The current mainstream view apparently is: priority of Mark<sup>122</sup> and Q. But there are alternatives: (1) The traditional order: Matthew, Mark, Luke,<sup>123</sup> (2) A Jerusalem School: Luke, Mark, Matthew,<sup>124</sup> (3) Why not other possibilities? The various combinations can be put in a Venn-diagram, see Figure 2. The related Figure 3 shows a diagram from wikipedia,<sup>125</sup> apparently basded upon a study by A.M. Honoré, with estimates of the degrees of overlap. The size of the gospels matters. An overlap in Luke and Mark might be 1% of Luke and 3% of Mark. One might hold that Mark was first and that Luke expanded, or that Luke was first and that Mark summarized. Overall, all this doesn't lead anywhere yet. Order would depend upon other considerations. It appears quite a study to handle these issues at sufficient detail. JLIV should alert the readership to the uncertainties and logical pitfalls rather than present the mainstream view as if it would be certain.

**Figure 2. Venn-diagram of overlap in the three synoptic gospels (not including size)**



**Figure 3. Source wikipedia. Only percentages, no sizes.**



<sup>122</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Markan\\_priority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Markan_priority)

<sup>123</sup> <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/273-examining-the-four-gospels>.

<sup>124</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem\\_school\\_hypothesis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem_school_hypothesis)

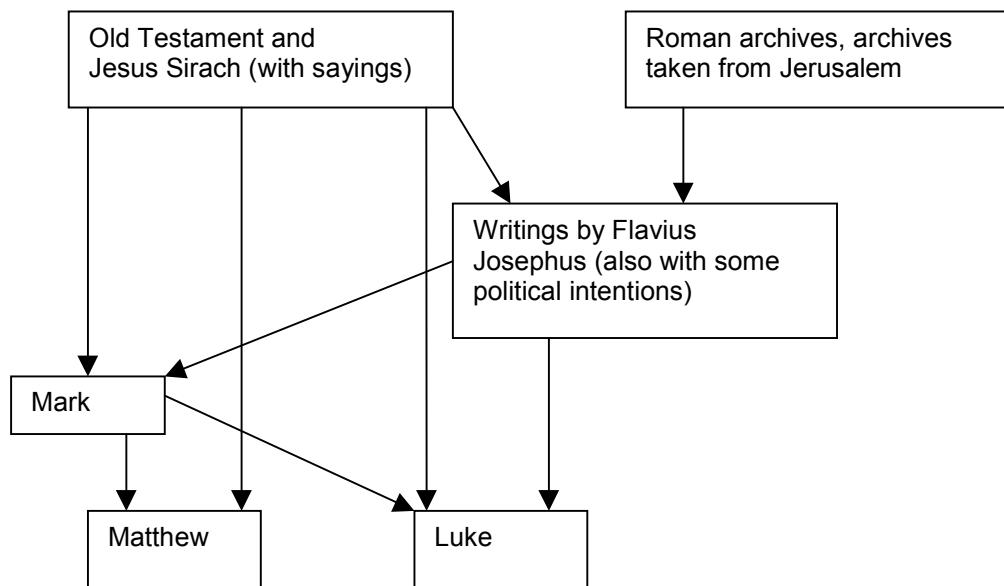
<sup>125</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/gospel\\_of\\_Matthew\\_and](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/gospel_of_Matthew_and)

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Relationship\\_between\\_synoptic\\_gospels.png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Relationship_between_synoptic_gospels.png)

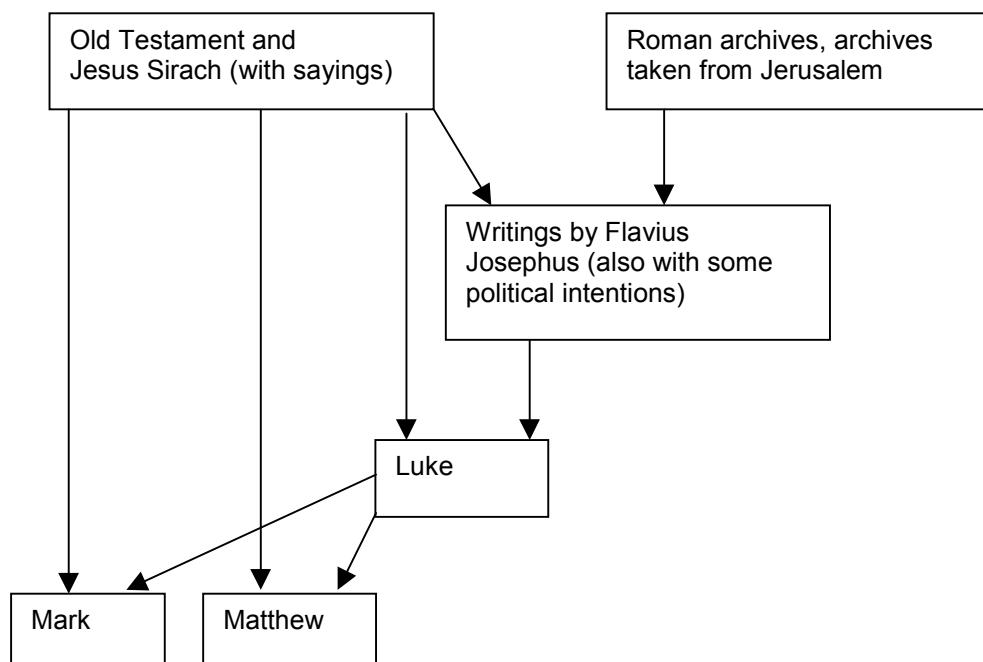
As said, I am no historian and I trust that the reader takes the following with a grain of salt. My point is mainly that mainstream research should not overlook deliberate creation.

Let me make some drawings myself. My advice is to include the OT, Jesus Sirach and FJ in such diagrams, to indicate, lest one forgets, that those sources would be available to the gospel editors in varying degree and need. Figure 4 displays the mainstream analysis to put Mark first. A consideration might be that editors creating Mark launched the idea of creating the new syncretic creed, which idea then was developed more systematically by the editors of Luke. An alternative dependency would be Figure 5.

**Figure 4. Priority for Mark, assuming deliberate creation.  
No inclusion yet of other sources like the Emmaus Narrative (Testimonium Flavianum)**



**Figure 5. Priority for Luke, assuming deliberate creation.  
No inclusion yet of other sources like the Emmaus Narrative (Testimonium Flavianum)**



A rationale for Figure 5 would be: If the gospels are created deliberately then it would make sense that Luke comes first since it is the most complete on the purposes of the creation. Luke is in Greek so that all authorities can understand what the creed is. Luke has a family tree of Jesus from Adam - which shows the Jewish root. The quotations by Jesus are not in sermons but dispersed over the text which suggests the use of a book of quotations like Jesus Sirach. The other gospels would be derivative, perhaps also produced centrally but perhaps also by distant pious converts with their own target audiences. Mark is targetted for Romans - but perhaps not in Rome but in Alexandria for legions in the region. Matthew is targetted for the Jews. JLIV:202 suggests that Mark for Romans is relatively friendly to Judaism and thus must come first, since later in time the relations are less good. But there can be other reasons, such as: it remains awkward to ask worship of a Jew and put down Jews in general. Matthew is critical of Judaism but still has a family tree for Jesus from Abraham, composes sermons that fit in with the Jewish approach of mass celebration, and thus seems targetted at trying to convert Jewish congregations. Matthew might follow Luke, since it is simpler to cut the family tree and collect quotes into sermons than the other way around, but both are possible.

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