

Arms and The Man: A Response to Dale Martin's 'Jesus in Jerusalem: Armed and Not Dangerous'

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Paula Fredriksen

Department of Comparative Religion, The Hebrew University, Israel

Abstract

Did Jesus oppose the temple? Did he predict its destruction? Against the recent proposals of Dale Martin, this article argues that the evidence is controvertible. However, the article does agree that Jesus' followers were probably armed with *μάχαιραι*; but so was a significant proportion of Jerusalem's male population, specifically at Passover. These 'arms', then, cannot explain Jesus' arrest and execution.

Keywords

Jerusalem, Jesus, Passover, rebel, swords, temple

One of the firmest facts that we have about Jesus' life – that is, his death – is also one of the most difficult to account for. No amount of intra-Jewish religious quarreling, which provides the bulk of the gospels' contents, can explain Jesus' very political, very Roman execution. In their efforts to link Jesus' Jewish mission to his Roman cross, historians and New Testament scholars have generated near-numberless scenarios. These fall into two main categories: either Jesus died because his mission and message threatened Jerusalem's priests, who then involved Pilate to neutralize their problem; or Jesus died because Rome interpreted his movement as politically dangerous. The first type of explanation foregrounds the scene at the temple, thus Markan chronology, to account for priestly

Corresponding author:

Paula Fredriksen, Department of Comparative Religion, The Hebrew University, Mount Scopus, Jerusalem 91905, Israel.

Email: augfred@bu.edu

hostility, and it posits that Jesus' offense was primarily 'religious'. The second type focuses on Pilate's skittishness, stimulated (whether rightly or wrongly) by the anti-Roman messianism (whether implicit or explicit) of Jesus' movement, thereby describing Jesus' offense as primarily 'political'.¹

Most recently, in order to propose a new explanation for the details of Jesus' death, Dale Martin has combined elements of both of these categories: Rome acted, he urges, because Jesus' followers 'and possibly Jesus himself, were armed' (Martin 2014: 20). Like some scholars, most notably Brandon (1967), Martin holds that Jesus' disciples in Jerusalem were prepared to combat Rome; unlike Brandon, Martin nicely situates their preparedness within a contemporary framing of apocalyptic expectation: 'Jesus was expecting the inbreaking of apocalyptic events ... an angelic army to break through the sky, engage the Romans and their Jewish clients in battle ... and establish the kingdom of God on earth ... [H]e and his followers would participate in the battle' (2014: 6-7). And like many scholars, following E.P. Sanders's groundbreaking argument in *Jesus and Judaism* (1985: 61-90), Martin holds that Jesus on this Passover did enact a scene in the temple courtyard, and that this action portended not the temple's purification but rather its impending apocalyptic destruction (2014: 9-15).

Unlike Sanders, however, and more like those scholars who hold to the first, 'religious' genre of explanation, Martin sees Jesus as actively hostile toward, and opposed to, the current temple and to a financially exploitative aristocratic priesthood (2014: 14-15, 20).² In support of this view, Martin further holds that Samaritans, oriented as they were to Mt Gerizim, were especially attracted to Jesus' anti-temple message (2014: 15-16). And in a singular reading of the gospel texts, Martin sees further proof of Jesus' anti-temple stance in Mark's account of Jesus' final meal with his disciples: in light of his opposition to the current temple, Martin avers, Jesus' Passover included no *corban Pesach* (2014: 16-17). Finally, like all scholars who hold that Rome was the chief force behind Jesus' arrest and execution, Martin must account for why Jesus' followers were not likewise rounded up, arrested and executed. Answer: Rome, ever pragmatic, governed without unnecessary exertion. Martin maintains that Rome quelled rebellions by strategically decapitating them. 'Execute the leader, disperse the crowd, brush off your hands and go back to Caesarea or Jerusalem' (2014: 18).

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1. For a review of scholarship on Jesus' death during the 1980s and 1990s (the years of the 'Jesus wars'), see Fredriksen 1995 and 1999: 220-59; more recently, Allison 2010: 387-434. The fifth volume of J.P. Meier's *A Marginal Jew*, much anticipated, is still to appear. Meier favors a Markan chronology, so volume 5 will focus on Jesus' time in Jerusalem. Brandon 1967 especially championed the anti-Roman Jesus, most recently reprised in a popular publication by Aslan 2013; cf. a review of the earlier history of this position in Bammel 1984.
 2. Sanders had explicitly denied priestly financial malfeasance; see 1985: 65-66 and 366 n. 38.

Martin's novel reconstruction has two great strengths: it takes seriously the apocalyptic commitments of Jesus and his earliest followers, and it emphasizes Roman interests and agency in Jesus' arrest and execution. Other problems, however – of inference, of argument, and finally of translation and of contextualization – attend. I will review these briefly, following the topic sections as Martin has presented them: (1) Rome's policy toward civilians carrying arms (2014: 3-9); (2) 'Jesus against the Temple' (2014: 9-15); (3) 'Samaritans and Lambs' (2014: 15-17); and (4) Roman techniques of control ('Answering Objections', 2014: 17-20). I will conclude, finally, with a point about translation and about historical ritual practices, which will lead us from the evangelical texts of c. 75–100 CE back to Jerusalem, at Passover, c. 30 CE.

Bearing Arms under Rome

Mark mentions that one of Jesus' followers in Gethsemane wielded a *μάχαιρα* ('sword', Mk 14.47 NRSV). Martin observes that the Markan verses *can* be read as meaning that (most of? all of?) Jesus' followers were armed, and that of these armed followers only one drew his weapon (2014: 5). Pointing to Luke's editing of his synoptic source, Martin again correctly notes the later evangelist's pacifying tendencies: the contrast brings out more clearly Mark's unapologetic recount. Whether Mark or Luke gives us any historically reliable information about the night of Jesus' arrest is another question, of course, quite independent of how we read their texts.

I will argue in closing – though for historical reasons, not for textual/literary ones – that Martin is most likely correct on this point: some of Jesus' disciples, on the night of his arrest, probably did carry *μάχαιραι*. Unfortunately, as we will see, this fact works precisely against the reason that Martin gives for adducing it, which is the *novum* of his reconstruction: Rome, he says, would have arrested any unauthorized person bearing arms in any of the cities that it controlled (2014: 7-9). For now, we must attend to two prior questions: Is this Roman ban on arms true in general? And was it true of Jerusalem in particular, and at Passover most especially?

'Laws prohibited anyone from walking around armed with weapons in [the city of] Rome itself', Martin states (2014: 7), a 'truth' so universally acknowledged in the scholarly literature that primary references, he notes, are seldom given for it (2014: 7 n. 9). Apart from one reference in Justinian's *Digest* (48.6.3.1), a sixth-century CE compendium that incorporates earlier material, there seems no such law about Rome *urbs* on the books. Martin ranges over a wide territory both temporal (about 1000 years) and terrestrial, from Thucydides' Athens to Josephus about Parthia and Petronius about a 'Greek city' to Synesius of Cyrene (early fifth century CE), in the effort to secure this point of principle for the first-century empire more generally (2014: 8-9). And if true of the empire,

then true of Jerusalem during Passover most especially, when nerves were taut and sedition always threatened (2014: 9; cf. *Bell.* 1.88). Q.E.D.: ‘If Jesus’ little band of young Galilean men were armed in Jerusalem during Passover, that in itself would have merited, in the eyes of Roman rulers, arrest and execution’ (2014: 9).

But not only is the *Digest* very late, other laws in this collection seem to point in the other direction. If *Digest* 48.6.1 prohibited collecting weapons ‘beyond what is customary for hunting or for a journey by land or by sea’, then weapons could be and doubtless were collected: the arguable issue was ‘what is customary’, not weapons as such (cf. 2014: 7 n. 9). And even if we assume that non-military Romans in first-century Rome would forebear to carry arms at least in the city’s sacred precincts (the *pomerium*), could we project such behavior to a *de facto* law for all the cities of the empire? One can infer such from scattered anecdotes, as Martin himself demonstrates; but inference is not evidence. Further, it is hard to see how such a law, were there ever such a law, would be enforced. Imperial cities were deeply individual and in many ways (save for taxes) were independent, with their own municipal calendars and often with their own coinage. And Rome governed lightly. Territory was administered, often by sub-contracting to local elites; it was not ‘occupied’ by Roman armies.

Finally, Jerusalem itself presents its own peculiarities. The high priests, not the Romans, were by and large in charge; the prefect (or, after 41–44 CE, the procurator) would come up from Caesarea only three times a year, to help with managing the pilgrim crowds. The soldiers (local Gentiles in Rome’s employ) were concentrated in and around the temple complex: Rome did not ‘control’ the city of Jerusalem *per se*. And finally, as we will see, many Jewish men in Jerusalem – more, surely, than only Jesus’ band of Galileans – were ‘armed’, *precisely* on Passover;³ but Josephus relates no stories of annual arrests and executions on this account. The reason for Jesus’ arrest, then, cannot have been primarily because he and/or his followers were armed.

‘Jesus against the Temple’

‘But why would Jesus’ disciples be armed in Jerusalem at Passover?’ (Martin 2014: 6). To answer this question, Martin mobilizes the apocalyptic context and content of Jesus’ mission, pointing to other similar expectations articulated in *The War Scroll*: Jesus anticipated the outbreak of heavenly battle, when he and

3. Martin assumes that those Jews at Passover, as reported in Josephus, *Ant.* 17.213–18, were ‘unarmed’, since Josephus describes them as throwing stones at Archelaus’s men rather than (evidently) resorting to more lethal weapons. On the contrary, I will argue that these men, like (at least two of) Jesus’ disciples, also carried μάχαιραι: see below, p. 12.

his followers would participate on the side of angelic armies to overthrow ‘the Jewish ruling class and the Romans’ (2014: 7).⁴

This putative double objective – Jewish aristocracy as well as Roman military – enables Martin to segue to the scene in the temple courtyard (Mk 11.15-19 and parr.) and thence, via Sanders, to the historicity of Jesus’ prediction of the temple’s destruction (2014: 9-11). ‘Jesus himself must actually have prophesied the destruction of the temple ... Jesus was looking for and advocating the destruction of the temple itself’ (2014: 14). From this prediction, Martin infers Jesus’ hostility, whether for religious reasons (2014: 14) or for social-economic ones (2014: 15). This hostility ‘would have been enough motivation for this Galilean apocalyptic prophet to arm a band of his followers and lead them to Jerusalem at Passover with the expectation that they ... [would join] an eschatological, heavenly army in overthrowing the Romans and their Jewish client-rulers’ (2014: 15).

Following the line of reasoning laid out by Sanders (1985), Martin rehearses the reasons for thinking that Jesus, c. 30 CE, could have so accurately foretold events in the year 70 CE. The sayings about destruction are multiply attested: both the synoptic tradition and John, with differences of detail, relate such a prediction (2014: 10). While acknowledging that Mark and Matthew both attribute this prophecy to false witnesses – thus in essence disavowing it – Martin wonders, ‘Is it possible that Matthew knows that Jesus had indeed made such a claim?’ Especially since Matthew’s Jesus thinks that God dwells in the temple (Mt. 23.21), such prophecies pass the ‘criterion of embarrassment’. So similarly with the Gospel of John: Jesus preaches routinely from the temple, and yet predicts its destruction (2014: 11). In brief, both Matthew and John retain anti-temple sayings even though these do not match their own apparent theologies. The sayings thus pass ‘the tests of dissimilarity and multiple attestation – we find it in more than one independent written source, and it goes against the tendencies of the authors of the Gospels’ (2014: 11). True of Matthew and of John; true that much more of Luke, who presents a pro-temple line in the Gospel and in Acts, but who bumps accusations of the temple’s destruction to Stephen’s hearing (Acts 6.11–7.60; Martin 2014: 12-13). ‘The author clearly knows that people thought that

4. We need not look as far afield as the DSS to find these traditions of cosmic battle. Paul tells the Thessalonians that, at the Parousia, ‘the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and the sound of the trumpet of God’ (1 Thess. 4.16). But Paul’s Christ battles against opponents much bigger and more powerful than Romans and their aristocratic clients: he will defeat the cosmic gods themselves (1 Cor. 15.22-26; cf. Rom. 8.18-37 and Phil. 2.10-11, where these powers, chastened, seem rehabilitated). Synoptic traditions about the returning Son of Man coming on clouds of glory with bands of angels (e.g., Mk 8.31) seem to refract similar expectations. On the confluence of Pauline and evangelical apocalyptic traditions, and how some version of these may go back to Jesus of Nazareth, see Fredriksen 1999: 78-154.

Jesus was going to destroy the temple – and perhaps knows that some Christians were boasting about it’ (2014: 12). The conclusion is clear: ‘Jesus himself must actually have prophesied the destruction of the temple’ (2014: 14). ‘A central part of the prophet Jesus’ message was a condemnation of the temple in Jerusalem, its cult and caretakers, and a prophecy of its destruction’ (2014: 15).

Martin’s careful canvassing of the gospels and Acts neglects one salient fact: these texts were all written *after* the temple’s destruction in 70 CE. In fact, they explain it: all four gospels link the destruction of the temple to the death of their main character, Jesus. Mark weaves a tissue of associations around ‘three days’/‘after three days’ with reference both to the temple’s downfall/rebuilding and to Jesus’ death/resurrection or parousia, and in 13.2 he puts an unambiguous prediction of destruction in Jesus’ mouth.⁵ Luke’s Jesus all but names the Roman legion that did the work (Lk. 19.43, cf. 21.20). John’s Jesus explicitly connects the two events, turning the temple’s destruction into a kind of Passion prediction (2.19), while specifically naming Romans as the destructive agents (11.48). Why did God allow his temple to be destroyed? Because, answer these late-first-century Jewish texts, the temple priesthood, in cooperation with Rome, had sought to destroy Jesus. Measure-for-measure, of course, the priests got worse than they gave: Jesus was raised and would return; the temple, meanwhile, was no more. My point: despite the persuasiveness of Sanders’s argument about the scene in the temple court, and despite the near-ubiquity of its acceptance, there are still good reasons to locate the gospels’ predictions of the temple’s destruction to the period post-70 CE.⁶

What about this prediction’s multiple attestation? Both Mark and John seem to have inherited a story about overturning the tables of the moneychangers. But they place the story at radically different points in their respective narratives, so that the story functions differently in each one. For Mk 11, the scene in the temple begins the sequence of events that will lead to the Passion; for Jn 2, this event, right at the beginning of Jesus’ mission, predicts the Passion but does not trigger it. Further, each evangelist gives Jesus different lines to speak. Mark’s Jesus quotes Isa. 56.7 and Jer. 7.11: he seems to be against the temple’s support services. John’s Jesus, uncharacteristically direct, says simply, ‘Take these things away; you shall not make my Father’s house a house of trade’ (Jn 2.16). In brief, although each evangelist glossed Jesus’ action slightly differently, both saw in the gesture the same meaning: Jesus condemned getting and spending – and, therefore, sacrificing – in the temple.

5. On Mark’s interweaving of Jesus’ death and the temple’s destruction, together with the temple’s rebuilding ‘after three days’ and Jesus’ resurrection/Parousia, see Fredriksen 2000: 180-85.

6. Fredriksen 2008: 246-82.

It was against the historicity of this (glossed) meaning that Sanders had argued. Focusing instead on Jesus' gesture, Sanders urged that Jesus really did overturn the temple tables during this last Passover. Jesus' actual meaning, however, was apocalyptic, not social-critical: the overturned tables signaled the temple's coming eschatological destruction, not a condemnation of its cult. On this last point, Martin, as many others, follows Sanders part way, accepting Jesus' gesture as apocalyptic prophecy while insisting against Sanders (though like Brandon and many others) that Jesus' action encoded a critique of the temple priesthood as well.

I think that there are several serious problems with this reconstruction:

(1) *Multiple attestation* of itself indicates the relative antiquity of a tradition, not its historical authenticity: a given tradition pre-dates its various manifestations in independent witnesses. *What* is attested still needs to be critically assessed. Both M and L, for example, relate stories about Mary's virginity. Scholars tend to look at these stories as evidence for how late-first-century evangelists are reading the LXX, not as evidence about the actual sexual status of Jesus' mother. Jesus raises the dead both in the Synoptic Gospels and in John. Scholars usually infer from this a tradition *not* that Jesus actually raised the dead, but that he was widely *thought* to have done so – a distinction with a difference. So too with this story about Jesus' overturning the tables: it precedes its appearance in our respective gospels. Whether it goes back to events in Jerusalem c. 30 CE, or whether it more plausibly fits a post-70 context – when ancient Christ-followers, like other Jews, would want to explain how God could have permitted such a catastrophe – still needs to be determined. And of course there is the still more fundamental (and confounding) question of John's degree of literary independence from Synoptic tradition.⁷

(2) *If* Jesus did indeed enact such a scene in the temple courtyard, and *if* he did intend by it to prophesy the temple's destruction, then we still have some awkward problems lying about. (a) We are required to think that both Mark and John inherited this story about the temple's tables independently, *and that each misinterpreted it, independently, in exactly the same way*, as a condemnation of temple offerings. (b) We need to explain how both evangelists, who otherwise have no problem forthrightly producing prophecies of the temple's destruction (Mk 13.2; Jn 11:48), would have so misconstrued a dramatic and powerful tradition from Jesus himself purportedly broadcasting the same message.

(3) Finally, if Jesus had made such a spectacular prophecy (Mk 13.2), or if he had enacted it at such a key moment in his mission (Mk 11.15-18, as decoded by

7. For a thorough review of this issue, see Smith 2001; also the comments by Meier 1991: 41-55.

modern scholars), then we have the puzzle of the resounding silence of Paul. Paul knew the original disciples, who had accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem and who thus would have known about the prophecy, had it occurred. Given that Paul himself throughout his letters proclaims the signs of the coming Kingdom, *why then does Paul evince no knowledge of Jesus' prediction?* Where he has an early *paradosis*, Paul mentions it; where he instructs his *ekklesiai* on what to look for as they await the returning Christ, Paul could naturally and easily have mentioned Jesus' teaching about the temple's destruction – had he known about it: at 1 Thess. 4.15 (cf. Mk 13); at Phil. 4.5; at 1 Cor. 15 or at Rom. 8, where he reviews the sequence of events at the End.

There are plenty of things in Paul's letters that the later gospels do not have, and there are plenty of things that the gospels say about Jesus that Paul does not have. But his eschatological traditions provide Paul's strongest links to the early Jesus movement in both its pre-resurrection and post-resurrection phases. *If* Jesus had predicted the temple's destruction as or at the End of the Age, and *if* Paul himself also speaks of such signs – including those that he insists he has by 'the word of the Lord' – then it is at least odd that he evinces no knowledge whatever of Jesus' prophecy.

Of course, if the original context of this prophecy is post-70, then it is not odd at all.

'Samaritans and Lambs'

Jesus' putative hostility to the temple and to its priesthood, claims Martin, 'may help make sense of some other details of our evidence' (2014: 15). He points to two in particular: Samaritans joining the movement after Jesus' death, and the menu at the Last Supper.

Were Samaritans part of the early post-resurrection movement? It is not easy to say. Hesitating (rightly) to consider Jn 4 as historical, Martin points to the 'good Samaritan' of Lk. 10, and to the stories of Samaritan conversions in Acts 8. 'What could have been more natural than Samaritans, who also [that is, like Jesus] rejected the temple in Jerusalem, finding attractive an anti-temple message still lingering among at least some of Jesus' followers after his death?' (2014: 15-16).

Luke's good Samaritan features in a parable: in short, he is fictive. The stories of Samaritans joining the movement in Acts 8 narratively demonstrate the fulfillment of the Risen Christ's directives in Acts 1.8: 'You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth'. As evidence goes, this is scant.

But the well-known Samaritan hostility towards Jerusalem's temple, to which Martin here refers, actually works *against* his argument about a significant Samaritan presence in the early Jesus movement. Traditions about the temple's

apocalyptic destruction do not end there. Such destruction is the first strophe of a two-stroke event: the coming of the new and final temple. And that new temple appears not just anywhere, but is established *in Jerusalem*.⁸ Indeed, the DSS writers were no less hostile than were Samaritans to the current Jerusalem temple; but they certainly expected the improved eschatological version to come in Jerusalem itself. The focus of Samaritan piety, however, remained and remains Mt Gerizim. The Jerusalem-centeredness of the Jesus movement, early and continuing, tells precisely against Samaritan attraction.⁹

What about a meat-free Last Supper? 'If Jesus was opposed to the temple cult, that would also explain a detail of the gospel narratives seldom noted by Christians. I speak of what we may call "the silence of the lamb" – or, to be more precise, the silence *about* the lamb' (2014: 16). The Synoptic Gospel texts, Martin maintains, do not say anything as such about a lamb at the meal; and from this silence he finds support for his previous arguments. 'In the absence of a lamb in our texts, combined with the temple-destruction prophecies of Jesus, combined with the demonstration against the temple performed by Jesus just before his arrest, I suggest that Jesus and his disciples would not have wanted to participate in the sacrificial cult ... and that they therefore could have no lamb for the [Passover] dinner. The absence of any mention of lamb fits the overall scenario' (2014: 17).

This is an argument from silence (as Martin reads the Last Supper texts) resting on two foregoing hypotheses. Knock away looking at the scene in the temple (Mk 11) and the prophecy of destruction (Mk 13) as implicitly or explicitly 'hostile' to the temple, and this 'silence' itself does not constitute evidence of Jesus' supposed anti-temple attitude.

But there are two other problems with Martin's construal. The first, and lesser, problem is the Eucharistic formula itself (Mk 14.24; cf. 1 Cor. 11.23-25). The entire instruction comes embedded in the language of the sacrificial cult. If anything like the Eucharistic formula goes back to the historical Jesus, then his (putative) principled opposition to the temple and its cult would be odd in the extreme. Had Jesus *not* esteemed the temple, its protocols of sacrifice, and its function as a place of atonement offerings for the forgiveness of sins, why would he have used them as the ultimate touchstone of his own mission?

8. That the new or renewed temple will appear in Jerusalem is a ubiquitous theme in the classical prophets through intertestamental literature, repeated in Paul and in other first-century Hellenistic Jewish texts eventually assembled in the NT. See Sanders 1985: 77-90. Even in those later Gentile forms of Christianity hostile to Judaism, Jerusalem dominates apocalyptic scenarios, e.g., Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 80-82.

9. The Jerusalem-centeredness of Jesus' mission is a key theme in the Gospel of John, and the fact that the earliest post-resurrection community settled in Jerusalem attests to the strong traditionalism of its idiosyncratic apocalyptic convictions; cf. also Rom. 11.25-26; Rev. 21.2.

But a lamb-less meal has another, major problem: Mark *does* explicitly state that Jesus and his group ate the sacrifice. ‘Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?’, Jesus’ disciples ask (Mk 14.12); and Jesus answers them saying, ‘I am to eat the Passover with my disciples’ (14.14). Martin maintains that ‘the word’ (i.e., ‘Passover’) ‘might be used to refer to the feast or the festival or the meal without necessarily including a lamb’ (2014: 16). The general truth of this claim to one side (who knows what vegetarians did at Passover in Jerusalem in the days of the Second Temple?), it is not true of Mark’s passage here. The verb (‘eat’) in tandem with the definite article preceding the noun (τὸ πάσχα, the Passover) can refer only to the *corban Pesach*. ‘The Passover’ is the sacrificed animal. Finally, and in addition, Mark portrays Jesus and his disciples, after the meal, as singing Hallel (ὕμνησαντες, 14.26). These are psalms celebrating pilgrimage to Jerusalem: an odd choice, if Jesus and his movement were so set against the city and its temple.¹⁰

Of course, and once again, it is difficult to know whether this passage in Mark, like that of any other gospel text, tells us anything reliable about the historical Jesus. And the fact that we have two different chronologies, Mark’s and John’s, only puts the issue more sharply: we do not know when Jesus was executed, on 15 Nisan (Mark) or on 14 Nisan (John). Further, Jewish time (then as now) measures by zones rather than by points. In antiquity, pre-70 CE, this holiday began on 7 Nisan, with the necessary seven-day purification ritual of the *parah adumah*; it ended only one week after the Passover was eaten, at the closing of the festival of Unleavened Bread (thus, 21 Nisan); and then there would be the run-up time of coming and leaving for the non-locals. Were we to be staunchly minimalist with the gospel stories, we could conclude only that Jesus died during some pilgrimage holiday or other, since Pilate evidently was also in town. Were we to be more sanguine – though still acknowledging the conflict between Mark’s chronology and John’s – we might say that Jesus died sometime during the Passover holiday, a period reasonably construed as encompassing at least three weeks.¹¹ Whichever reconstruction we choose, though, I would hesitate to make very much about present Samaritans and absent lambs.

10. Psalms 113–118 comprise Hallel, which evokes Aaron’s house (that is, the priesthood; 115.10, 12; 118.3), and the ‘Lord’s house’, his courtyards, altar and his gates, that is, the temple in Jerusalem (Pss. 116.18–19; 118.19–20, 26–27). I thank Israel Yuval, who first pointed out to me this connection between ‘hymning’ (Mk 14.26) and Hallel.

11. I would discount Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 5.7 (‘Christ, our Paschal lamb, is slain for us’) as useful for determining the actual season of Jesus’ death. Paul’s use of the image is less about Jesus than it is about moral exhortation to his community. Paul urges his followers to cleanse themselves of the ‘leaven’ of pride now that, through Christ’s death, the (metaphorical) holiday of Passover has already begun. The Paschal image, in other words, refers to Jewish time-keeping (leaven should be long gone by the beginning of Passover), not to Jesus’ crucifixion *per se*.

‘Answering Objections’

Why was Jesus crucified, but his followers were not? The question nicely frames the evidential problems with Jesus’ death. Had Pilate simply wanted Jesus out of the way (whether for his own reasons or as a favor to the priests), he could have killed him by much less public means – a *desideratum*, in light of the volatility of the holiday. Crucifixion implies that Pilate truly thought that Jesus posed a political threat. The survival of Jesus’ immediate followers, however, and their subsequent and unimpeded settling in Jerusalem, points in exactly the opposite direction: clearly no one in power, Pilate or priest, was concerned about a real threat. Why, then, was Jesus crucified?¹²

This question focuses even more sharply on Martin’s reconstruction: after all, according to him, Jesus and his followers were indeed armed with swords. Pointing to the examples of Pilate and the Samaritan Prophet (*Ant.* 18.85-87), and to Herod Antipas and John the Baptist (*Ant.* 18.113-19), Martin answers that Rome typically disposed only or chiefly of the leader and then disbanded the group. ‘Just kill the ringleader and let the mob disperse’ (2014: 18). In other words, even though Jesus’ followers were (so Martin) actually armed with swords, once they fled, Pilate was content that he had neutralized the threat.

This seems an odd reading of Josephus. Pilate made such a bloody mess of the Samaritan incident that Vitellius sent him to Rome, where the emperor relieved him of his job (*Ant.* 18.85-89). The Romans cut down both Theudas and his (unarmed?) followers (*Ant.* 20.5); later, with the Egyptian prophet, Felix slaughtered the mob, though its leader escaped (*Bell.* 2.13; cf. Acts 21.38). And the whole city of Jerusalem, not just the various leaders of the rebellion, paid the price in 70 CE for the first Jewish war. Finally, the Baptizer’s execution is not at all analogous to any of these other cases, and especially to that of Jesus.¹³ John was arrested alone, whisked off-stage, and executed quietly, out of the public eye, in the socially contained environment of a prison (and by a Jewish tetrarch,

12. Sanders puts the question towards the end of *Jesus and Judaism* (1985: 294-318). Several scholars, myself among them, have tried to tackle the problem head-on. One solution to the conundrum is to favor a John-like chronology over a Mark-like chronology. Had Jesus taught repeatedly at the temple and in Jerusalem during the pilgrimage holidays, as the Fourth Gospel depicts, then both Pilate and the priests would have known perfectly well that Jesus posed no practical threat: Jesus expected angelic armies, not earthly ones, to establish God’s kingdom. The crucifixion was addressed to the crowds who, at his final Passover, hailed him as messiah (Fredriksen 1999; 2008). Justin Meggitt proposes, instead, that the scene at the temple persuaded Pilate that Jesus was an isolated madman (2007: 401). Accordingly, Pilate killed him and him alone (2007: 406); he just so happened to have chosen crucifixion as his means of doing so (cf. Fredriksen 2007: 417). Finally, Fernando Bermejo-Rubio 2013 has suggested that the conundrum itself is false, since Jesus was crucified together with other *lēstai*.

13. Meier made this argument in some detail (2001: 625); cf. Fredriksen 2008: 254-56.

not by a ‘Roman’). Jesus was ambushed with his (armed?) followers, with crowds of enthusiasts *in situ* (cf. Mk 14.2), and executed publicly just outside of Jerusalem in the course of a tumultuous pilgrimage holiday. Had Jesus’ followers been armed with swords – thus seeming very like a rebel band – surely the arresting *σπεῖρα* could and would have given chase, had Pilate *really* thought that Jesus ‘was the leader of a rebel band, a potential instigator of armed revolt’ (2014: 19).¹⁴

On one major point, however, Martin and I are agreed: at least some of Jesus’ party, we both hold, carried *μάχαιραι*. But against Martin, I would insist that carrying a *μάχαιρα* was one of the last things that would have gotten a Jewish male arrested at Passover. One man out of every ten-person group (if we can trust the principles of Josephus’s reckoning for Passover) would have done so: 255,600 is the number that he gives for sheep slain, thus for males sacrificing.¹⁵ *μάχαιρα* in this context does not mean ‘sword’. It means ‘knife’, specifically the large knife used for slaughtering animals in sacrifice. It translates the Hebrew word *מאכלת*, as at Gen. 22.6 LXX.¹⁶ (Unless we suppose that the Hellenistic Abraham was about to decapitate Isaac, the word there must also mean ‘sacrificial knife’.)

Historical reconstruction of how thousands of priests and Levites and tens of thousands of worshipers together with their animals would have managed to effect the Passover sacrifice within a few hours on the afternoon of 14 Nisan remains controversial.¹⁷ The point, however, is that the men on the temple mount would have carried their own knives to do the slaughtering.¹⁸ If any of Jesus’

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14. In the Synoptics, it is the priests who send out an *ochlos* (‘group’?; cf. ‘crowd’, Mk 14.43 NRSV) to ambush Jesus; in John, a Roman ‘cohort’ (*speira* – an impossibly large group of men for a supposedly surreptitious operation) arrests Jesus: the implication, undermined by Jn 18.29-19.22, is that Pilate was behind the arrest. With Martin (2014: 19), I agree that the Johannine scenario is superior in terms of historical plausibility to Mark’s (Fredriksen 2008: 266-75).
 15. These are Josephan numbers, so the usual cautions obtain. I refer to the reckoning that Josephus reports was made by the priests when Cestius was the Syrian legate (*Bell.* 6.420-27).
 16. Liddell and Scott give as the first definitions for *μάχαιρα*: ‘large knife, or dirk; carving-knife; sacrificial knife’. The Hebrew *מאכלת* contains the root *אכל*, which hints at the tie between sacrifice and eating. I thank Mike Hinkle who, many years ago, first drew my attention to Abraham’s *μάχαιρα* in Genesis 22.6 LXX.
 17. For discussion, see Sanders 1992: 127, 135-39; see, before him, Jeremias 1969.
 18. Tosephta *Pesachim* 4, 13 tells the story of Hillel, an elder contemporary of Jesus, who had to deal with various problems arising when 14 Nisan fell on a Sabbath. One of those problems was carrying, in the public domain, both the animals for the sacrifice and the knives necessary to do the job. Hillel ingeniously rules that the animals can walk themselves up to the temple mount, and that the knives, if attached somehow to them, can likewise be conveyed without infringement. The point is not the story’s historical plausibility or lack thereof, but rather its presupposition that worshipers were responsible for coming to the mount with their own knives. My thanks to Oded Irshai for bringing this text to my attention.

followers, the night of the meal, indeed carried *μάχαιραι* as the synoptic evangelists portray, this would align the episode in Gethsemane (Mk 14.47 and parr.) with the preceding story of the disciples' arrangements for themselves and their teacher 'to eat the Passover' (Mk 14. 12-16): they would have come to Jerusalem prepared to offer the *corban*. So too tens of thousands of other pilgrims would have done. Contending with masses of pilgrims carrying sacrificial knives was part and parcel of dealing with the city at Passover, both for the priests and for the Roman soldiers assisting during the holiday to police the temple precincts. If, therefore, some of Jesus' followers were so 'armed', that fact explains nothing, *pace* Martin, about Jesus' arrest and execution (cf. 2014: 20).

'Knife' became 'sword' once the Greek gospels came over into Latin, when *gladius* stood in the stead of *μάχαιρα*. The Latin translations of these gospel texts are late, anonymous and very varied: in the 90s of the fourth century, Augustine was still lamenting their variability and extreme instability.¹⁹ We can conjecture anything we want about the historical circumstances of these translations – place, time, and agency – because these are totally lost to us. All we know is that, with *gladius*, 'sword' entered the bloodstream of the Western textual tradition, and so it remains right up to the NRSV of our own days.

Did 'Mark', whoever he was and wherever and whenever he wrote, also think 'sword' when he composed his story? Or, heir to a tradition reaching back ultimately to the 30s, and to an Aramaic/Hebrew historical stratum, did he think 'sacrificial knife' when he said '*μάχαιρα*'? We of course cannot know. But what we *can* know, if we as historians try to imagine ourselves back in Jerusalem at *Pesach* before the temple's destruction, is that, in this earlier and specific Jewish context, *μάχαιρα* meant 'knife'. Bearing one aligned its owner with the temple's cult, and with the festival protocols of Leviticus, of Numbers and of Deuteronomy. And it reveals nothing about the reasons why Jesus was arrested that Passover, and why he died by crucifixion.

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19. 'In the early days of the faith', Augustine complains, 'any person who got hold of a Greek manuscript and who thought of himself as skilled in both languages went ahead with his own Latin translation' (*de doctrina Christiana* 2.11, 16). Compounding the problem was the absence of a Jewish translation charismatically 'authorized' in the way that the LXX was thought to have been.

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