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review

**The christians
of Beth Shean :
A gnostic
community ?**

**Was Paul murdered
by Barrabas ?**

**Discovery: the manuscript
of Matthias the Apostle**

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Once upon a time....

There was nothing so *very* remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so *very* much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself, ‘Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late!’(when she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural); but when the Rabbit actually *took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket*, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of There was nothing so *very* remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so *very* much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself, ‘Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late!’ (when she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural); but when the Rabbit actually *took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket*, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and fortunately was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge.



Lewis Carroll, director of the publication Christian Archaeology review

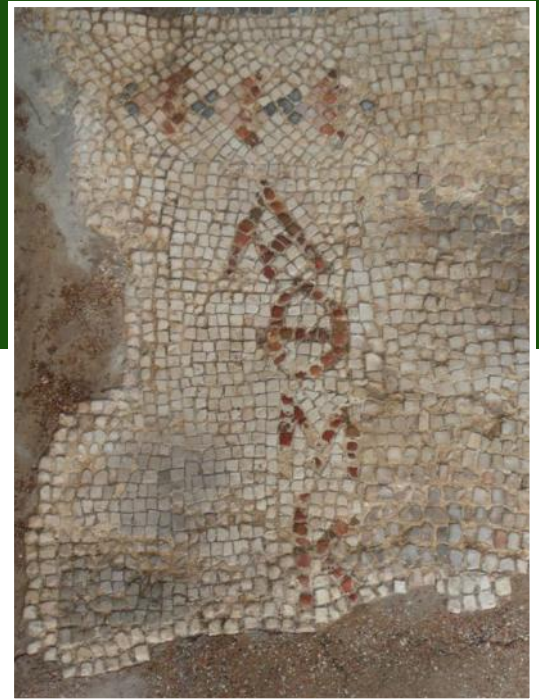
Summary

The christians of Beth Shean by English Wiki	2
Was Paul murdered by Barrabas ? by Juda Balaam	6
Discovery : The manuscript of Mathhias the Apostle an interview of Anna Mashal by John Doe	8
The shipwreck of Paul by Horatio Nelson.....	10
Books	14
Events.....	15

The christians of Beth Shean : A gnostic community ?

by English Wiki

Beit She'an (Hebrew: **בֵּית שֶׁאֲן** *Beth Šəʾān*; Arabic: **بيسان**, *Beesān*, *Beisan* or *Bisan*)^[2] is a city in the North District of Israel which has played an important role historically due to its geographical location at the junction of the Jordan River Valley and Jezreel Valley. It has also played an important role in modern times, acting as the regional center for the numerous villages in the Beit She'an Valley Regional Council.



2

History

Beit She'an's location has often been strategically significant, as it sits at the junction of the Jordan River Valley and the Jezreel Valley, essentially controlling access from the interior to the coast, as well as from Jerusalem to the Galilee.

Early Beit She'an

In 1933, archaeologist G.M. FitzGerald, under the auspices of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, carried out a "deep cut" on Tell el-Hosn, the large mound of Beth Shean in order to determine the earliest occupation of the site. His results suggest that settlement began in the Late Neolithic or Early Chalcolithic periods (sixth to fifth millennia BCE).^[3] Occupation continued intermittently up to the late Early Bronze Age I (3200-3000), according to pottery finds, and then resumes in the Early Bronze Age III.^[4] A large cemetery on the northern side of the mound was in use from the Bronze Age to Byzantine times.^[5] Canaanite graves dating from 2000-1600 BCE were discovered in 1926.^[6]



Egyptian period

After the Egyptian conquest of Beit She'an by pharaoh Thutmose III in the 15th-century BCE (recorded in an inscription at Karnak),^[7] the small town on the summit of the Tell became the center of the Egyptian administration of the region.^[8] The Egyptian newcomers changed the

organization of the town and left a great deal of material culture behind. A large Canaanite temple (39 meters in length) excavated by the University of Pennsylvania Museum may date from about the same period as Thutmose III's conquest, though the Hebrew University excavations suggest that it dates to a later period.^[9] Artifacts of potential cultic significance were found in the temple. Based on a stele found in the temple and inscribed with Egyptian hieroglyphs, the

temple was dedicated to the god Mekal.^[10] One of the University Museum's most important finds near the temple is the Lion and Dog stela (currently in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem), which depicts two combat scenes between these two creatures. The Hebrew University excavations determined that this temple was built on the site of an earlier one.^[11]

During the three hundred years of Egyptian rule (18th Dynasty to the 20th Dynasty), the population of Beit

She'an appears to have been primarily Egyptian administrative officials and military personnel. The town was completely rebuilt, following a new layout, during the 19th dynasty.^[12] The University Museum excavations uncovered two important stelae from the period of Seti I and a monument of Rameses II.^[13] Pottery was produced locally, but some was made to mimic Egyptian forms.^[14] Other Canaanite goods existed alongside Egyptian imports or locally-made Egyptian style objects.^[15] The 20th dynasty saw the construction of large administrative buildings in Beit She'an, including Building 1500, a small palace for the Egyptian governor.^[16] During the 20th dynasty, invasions of the "Sea Peoples" upset Egypt's control over the Eastern Mediterranean. Though the exact circumstances are unclear, the entire site of Beit She'an was destroyed by fire around 1150 BCE. The Egyptians did not attempt to rebuild their administrative center and lost control of the region.

Biblical period

An Iron Age I Canaanite city was constructed on the site of the Egyptian center shortly after its destruction.^[17] Around 1100 BC, Canaanite Beit She'an was conquered by the Philistines, who used it as a base of operations for further penetrations into Israel proper. During a subsequent battle against the Jewish King Saul at nearby Mount Gilboa in 1004 BC, the Philistines prevailed. 1 Samuel 31 states that the victorious Philistines hung the body of King Saul on the walls of Beit She'an. Portions of these walls were excavated on Tel Beit She'an recently.^[18] King David was able to capture Beit She'an in a series of brilliant military campaigns, that expelled the Philistines from the area, pushing them back to their coastal strongholds of Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, Gaza, Ashdod.

During the Iron Age II period, the town became a part of the larger Israelite kingdom under the rule of the Biblical



kings David and Solomon (I King 4:12 refers to Beit She'an as a part of the district of Solomon, though the historical accuracy of this list is debated.^[19] The Assyrian conquest of northern Israel under Tiglath-Pileser III (732 BCE) brought

about the destruction of Beit She'an by fire. Minimal reoccupation occurred until the Hellenistic period.^[14]

Roman period

The Hellenistic period saw the reoccupation of the site of Beit She'an under the new name Scythopolis, possibly named after the Scythian mercenaries who settled there as veterans. Little is known about the Hellenistic city, but during the 3rd century BCE a large temple was



constructed on the Tell.^[20] It is unknown which deity was worshipped there, but the temple continued to be used during Roman times. The local Greek mythology holds that the city was founded by Dionysus and that his nursemaid Nysa was buried there; thus it was sometimes known as Nysa-Scythopolis. Graves dating from the Hellenistic period are simple singular rock-cut tombs.^[21] From 301 to 198 BCE the area was under the control of the Ptolemies, and Beit She'an is mentioned in 3rd-2nd centuries BC written sources describing the Syrian Wars between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid dynasties. In 198 BCE the Seleucids conquered the region. The town played a role after the Hasmonean Maccabee Revolt: Josephus records that the Jewish High Priest Jonathan was killed there by Demetrius II Nicator.^[22] The city was destroyed by fire at the end of the 2nd century BCE.^[23]

In 63 BC, Pompey made Judea a part of the Roman empire. Beit She'an was refounded and rebuilt by Gabinius.^[24] The town center shifted from the summit of the Tel to its slopes. Scythopolis prospered and became the leading city of the Decapolis, a loose confederation of ten cities that were centers of Greco-Roman culture, an event so significant that the town based its calendar on that year. Pax Romana favoured the city, evidenced by its high-level urban planning and extensive construction including the best preserved Roman theatre of ancient Samaria as well as a hippodrome, cardo, and other trademarks of the Roman influence. Mount Gilboa, 7 kilometres (4.3 mi) away, provided dark basalt blocks as well as water via an aqueduct. The town is said to have sided with the Romans during the Jewish uprising of 66 CE.^[24] Excavations have focused less on the Roman period ruins, so less is known about this period. The University Museum excavation of the northern cemetery, however, did uncover significant finds. The Roman era tombs are of the *loculus* type: a rectangular rock-cut chamber with smaller chambers (*loculi*) cut into its side.^[21] Bodies were placed in the *loculi* or inside sarcophagi which were the placed in the loculi. A sarcophagus with an inscription identifying its occupant in Greek as "Antiochus, the son of Phallion" may have held the cousin of Herod the Great.^[21] One of the most interesting Roman grave finds was a bronze incense shovel with the handle in the form of an animal leg and hoof, now in the University of Pennsylvania Museum.^[25]

Byzantine period

Copious archaeological remains were found dating to the Byzantine period (330 CE – 636 CE) and were excavated by the University of Pennsylvania Museum from 1921-23. A rotunda church was constructed on top of the Tell and the entire city was enclosed in a wall.^[26] Textual sources mention several other churches in the town.^[26] Beit She'an was primarily Christian, as attested to by the large number of churches, but evidence of Jewish habitation and a Samaritan synagogue indicate established communities of these minorities. The pagan temple in the city centre was destroyed, but the nymphaeum and Roman baths were restored. Many of the buildings of Scythopolis were damaged in the Galilee earthquake of 363, and in 409 it became the capital of the northern district, Palaestina Secunda.^[23] Dedicatory inscriptions indicate a preference for donations to religious buildings, and many colourful mosaics, such as that featuring the zodiac in the Monastery of Lady Mary, or the one picturing a menorah and shalom in the House of Leontius' Jewish synagogue, were preserved. A Samaritan synagogue's mosaic was unique in abstaining from human or animal images, instead utilising floral and geometrical motifs. Elaborate decorations were also found in the settlement's many luxurious villas, and in the 6th century especially, the city reached its maximum size of 40,000 and spread beyond its period city walls.^[23]

renamed Baysan. The day of victory came to be known in Arabic as *Yawm Baysan* or "the day of Baysan."^[2] The city was not damaged and the newly arrived Muslims lived together with its Christian population until the 8th century, but the city declined during this period and its glorious Roman-Byzantine architecture was lost to neglect. Structures were built in the streets themselves, narrowing them to mere alleyways, and makeshift shops were opened among the colonnades. The city reached a low point by the 8th century, witnessed by the removal of marble for producing lime, the blocking off of the main street, and the conversion of a main plaza into a cemetery.^[28] Al-Muqaddasi wrote that Baysan was "on the river, with plentiful palm trees, and water, though somewhat heavy (brackish)" and Abu Ubayd al-Andalusi noted that the wine produced there was delicious.^[2]



On January 18, 749, Umayyad Baysan was completely devastated by the Golan earthquake of 749. A few residential neighborhoods grew up on the ruins, probably established by the survivors, but the city never recovered its magnificence. The city center moved to the southern hill where a Crusader fortress surrounded by a moat was constructed.^[29]

Crusader period

In the Crusader period, the settlement was part of the Belvoir fiefdom. A small fort was built east of the defunct amphitheater.^[30]

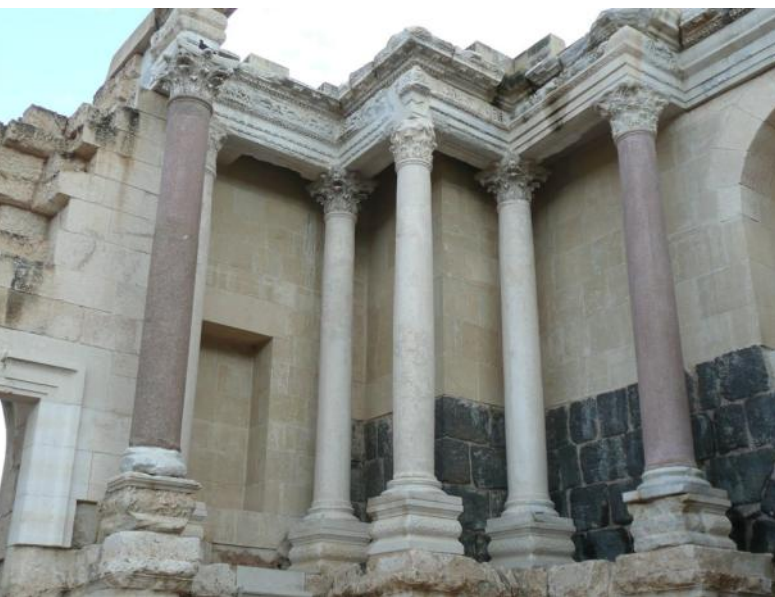
Mamluk period

Under Mamluk rule, Beit She'an was the principal town in the district of Damascus and a relay station for the postal service between Damascus and Cairo. It was also the capital of sugar cane processing for the region. Jisr al-Maqtu'a, a bridge consisting of a single arch spanning 25 feet and hung 50 feet above a stream, was built during that period.^[2]

Ottoman period

Beit She'an was long home to a Jewish community. The 14th century Jewish topographer Ishtori Haparchi settled there and completed his work *Kaftor Vaferech* in 1322, the first Hebrew book on the geography of Palestine.^[31]

During the 400 years of Ottoman rule, Baysan lost its regional importance. During the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II when the Haifa-Damascus extension of the Hejaz



The Byzantine period portion of the northern cemetery was excavated in 1926. The tombs from this period consisted of small rock-cut halls with vaulted graves on three sides.^[27] A great variety of objects were found in the tombs, including terracotta figurines possibly depicting the Virgin and Child, many terracotta lamps, glass mirrors, bells, tools, knives, finger rings, iron keys, glass beads, bone hairpins, and many other items.^[27]

Umayyad period

In 634, Byzantine forces were defeated by the Muslim forces of Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab and the city was

railway was constructed, a limited revival took place. The local peasant population was largely impoverished by the Ottoman feudal land system which leased tracts of land to tenants and collected taxes from them for their use.^[2]

The Swiss-German traveler Johann Ludwig Burckhardt described Beisan in 1812 as "a village with 70 to 80 houses, whose residents are in a miserable state." In the early 1900s, though still a small and obscure village, Beisan was known for its plentiful water supply, fertile soil, and its production of olives, grapes, figs, almonds, apricots, and apples.^[2]

British Mandate

In 1934, Lawrence of Arabia noted that "Bisan is now a purely Arab village," where "very fine views of the river can be had from the housetops." He further noted that, "Many nomad and Bedouin encampments, distinguished by their black tents, were scattered about the riverine plain, their flocks and herds grazing round them."^[2] Beisan was home to a mainly Mizrahi Jewish community of 95 until 1936, when the 1936–1939 Arab revolt saw Beisan serve as a center of Arab attacks on Jews in Palestine.^{[31][32][33]} In 1938, after learning of the murder of his close friend and Jewish leader Haim Sturmann, Orde Wingate led his men on an offensive in the Arab section of Beit She'an, the rebels' suspected base.^[34]

According to population surveys conducted in British Mandate Palestine, Beisan consisted of 5,080 Muslim Arabs out of a population of 5,540 (92% of the population), with the remainder being listed as Christians.^[35] In 1945, the surrounding "Beisan district"



consisted of 16,660 Muslims (67%), 7,590 Jews (30%), and 680 Christians (3%), and Arabs owned 44% of land, Jews owned 34%, and 22% constituted public lands. The 1947 UN Partition Plan allocated Beisan and most of its district to the proposed Jewish state.^{[2][36][37]}



State of Israel

Jewish militias and local Bedouins first clashed during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War in February and March 1948, part of Operation Gideon,^[2] which Walid Khalidi argues was part of a wider Plan Dalet.^[38] Joseph Weitz, a leading Yishuv figure, wrote in his diary on May 4, 1948 that, "The Beit Shean Valley is the gate for our state in the Galilee...[I]ts clearing is the need of the hour."^[2]

Beisan fell to the Jewish militias three days before the end of British Mandate Palestine. After Israel's Declaration of Independence in May 1948, during intense shelling by Syrian border units, the Arab inhabitants, followed by the recapture of the valley by the Haganah, fled across the Jordan River.^[39] The property and buildings abandoned after the conflict were then held by the state of Israel.^[2] Most Arab Christians relocated to Nazareth. A ma'abarah (refugee camp) inhabited mainly by North African immigrants was erected in Beit She'an, and it later became a development town.

In 1999, Beit She'an was incorporated as a city.^[40] Geographically, it lies in the middle of the Beit She'an Valley Regional Council.^[41]

Beit She'an was the hometown and political power base of David Levy, a prominent figure in Israeli politics.

Israeli-Arab conflict

In the 1974 Beit She'an attack, militants of the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, took over an apartment building and murdered a family of four.^[32] In the 2002 Beit She'an attack, six Israelis were killed and over 30 were injured by two Palestinian militants who opened fire and threw grenades at a polling station in the center of Bet She'an where party members were voting in the Likud primary.

Was Paul murdered by Barrabas ?

by Juda Balaam

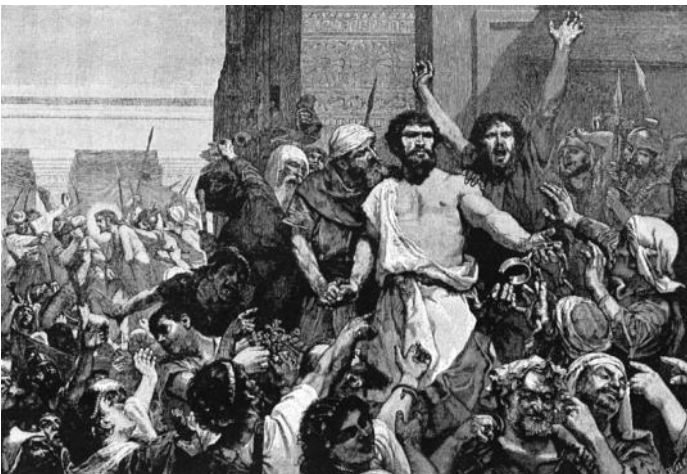


Barabbas or **Jesus Barabbas** (literally "son of the father" or "Jesus, son of the father" respectively) is a figure in the Christian narrative of the Passion of Jesus, in which he is the insurrectionary whom Pontius Pilate freed at the Passover feast in Jerusalem.

6

The penalty for Barabbas' crime was death by crucifixion, but according to the four canonical gospels and the non-canonical Gospel of Peter there was a prevailing Passover custom in Jerusalem that allowed or required Pilate, the *praefectus* or governor of Judaea, to commute one prisoner's death sentence by popular acclaim, and the "crowd" (*ochlos*) — which has become "the Jews" and "the multitude" in some translations — were offered a choice of whether to have Barabbas or Jesus Christ released from Roman custody. According to the closely parallel gospels of Matthew,^[1] Mark,^[2] and Luke,^[3] and the accounts in John^[4] and the Gospel of Peter, the crowd chose Barabbas to be released and Jesus of Nazareth to be crucified. A passage found only in the Gospel of Matthew has the crowd saying, "Let his blood be upon us and upon our children".^[5]

The story of Barabbas has special social significances, because it has historically been used to lay the blame for the crucifixion of Jesus on the Jews, and to justify anti-Semitism—an interpretation, known as *Jewish*



deicide, dismissed by Pope Benedict XVI in his 2011 book, in which he also questions the historicity of the passage in Matthew.^{[6][7]}

Biblical record

Matthew refers to Barabbas only as a "notorious prisoner."^[8] Mark and Luke further refer to Barabbas as one involved in a *stasis*, a riot.^[9] John 18:40 refers to Barabbas as a *lēstēs* ("bandit"), "the word Josephus always employs when talking about Revolutionaries", Robert Eisenman observes.^[10]

Three gospels state that there was a custom at Passover during which the Roman governor would release a prisoner of the crowd's choice: Mark 15:6; Matthew 27:15; and John 18:39. Later copies of Luke contain a corresponding verse (Luke 23:17), though it is not present in the earliest manuscripts, and may be a later gloss to bring Luke into conformity.^[11] The gospels differ on whether the custom was a Roman one or a Jewish one, as part of the Jubilee.^[12]

No custom of releasing prisoners in Jerusalem is recorded in any historical document other than the gospels. An Ancient Roman celebration called *Lectisternium* involved feasting and sometimes included a temporary removal of the chains from all prisoners.^[13] However, J. Blinzler associates Barabbas' release with a passage in the Mishna Peshahim 8,6 which says that the Passover lamb may be offered 'for one whom they have promised to bring out of prison'. (J. Blinzler, *The Trial of Jesus*, 1959, pp218ff.)

Name

Barabbas' name appears as *bar-Abbas* in the Greek texts. It is derived ultimately from the Aramaic *בֶּר-אַבְבָּא* *Bar-abbâ*, "son of the father". According to early Greek texts, Barabbas' full name was *Jesus Barabbas*.^[14] Later texts shorten his name to just *Barabbas*.

Abba has been found as a personal name in a 1st-century burial at Giv'at ja-Mivtar, and *Abba* also appears as a personal name frequently in the Gemara section of the Talmud, dating from AD 200–400.^[15] These findings support "Barabbas" being used to indicate the son of a person named Abba or Abbas (a patronymic).

Abba means "father" in Aramaic, and appears both translated and untranslated in the Gospels. A translation of *Bar-Abbas* would be *son of the father*. Jesus often referred to God as "father", and Jesus' use of the Aramaic word *Abba* survives untranslated in Mark 14:36 (in most English translations). This has led some authors (named below) to speculate that "bar-Abbâ" could actually be a reference to Jesus himself as "son of the father".

In his novel *All Who Came Before*, Biblical Scholar, Simon Perry, takes Bar-Abbas as a title meaning 'son of the father'. The central character is also the son of a rabbi (leading to a word-play with "Bar-Rabbas"). Bar-Abbas is a well intentioned believer whose actions in a Jewish resistance movement make him a kind of Dietrich Bonhoeffer figure. His heroics, and the type of resistance he sought, are what led the

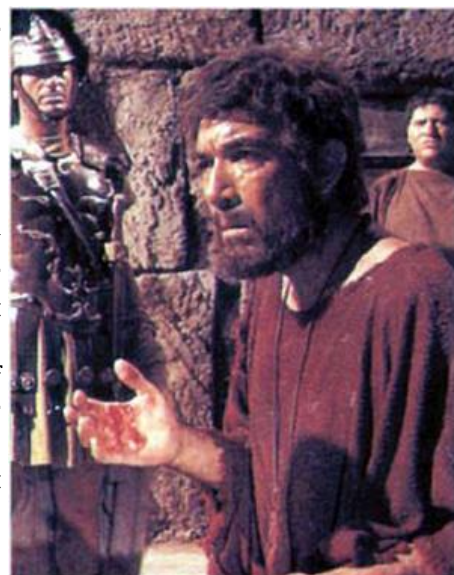


crowds to call for his release over the more passive resistance offered by Yeshua of Nazareth.^[16]

Other interpretations

Benjamin Urrutia, co-author of *The Logia of Yeshua: The Sayings of Jesus*, agrees with Maccoby and others who say that Yeshua Bar Abba or Jesus Barabbas

must be none other than Jesus of Nazareth, and that the choice between two prisoners is a fiction. However, Urrutia opposes the notion that Jesus may have either led or planned a violent insurrection. Jesus was a strong advocate of "turning the other cheek" – which means not submission but strong and courageous, though nonviolent, defiance and



resistance. Jesus, in this view, must have been the planner and leader of the Jewish nonviolent resistance to Pilate's plan to set up Roman Eagle standards on Jerusalem's Temple Mount. The story of this successful resistance is told by Josephus — who does not say who the leader was, but does tell of Pilate's crucifixion of Jesus just two paragraphs later in a passage whose authenticity is heavily disputed.^[17]

Possible parable

This practice of releasing a prisoner is said by Magee and others to be an element in a literary creation of Mark, who needed to have a contrast to the true "son of the father" in order to set up an edifying contest, in a form of parable.

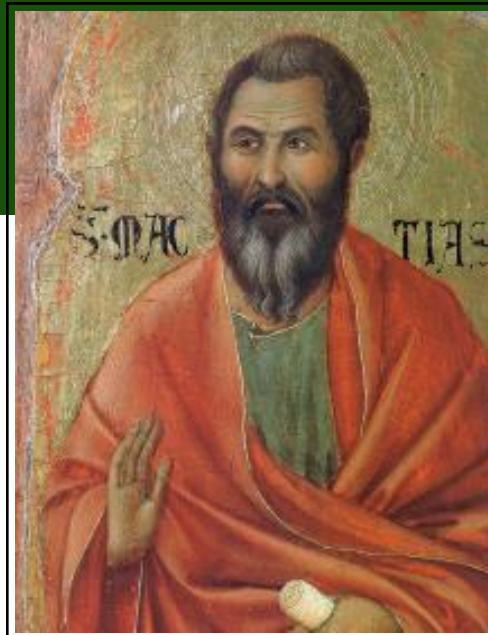
Dennis R. MacDonald, in *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark*, notes that a similar episode to the one that occurs in Mark—of a crowd picking one figure over another figure similar to the other—occurred in *The Odyssey*, where Odysseus entered the palace disguised as a beggar and defeated his wife's suitors to reclaim his throne.^[18] MacDonald suggests Mark borrowed from this section of *The Odyssey* and used it to pen the Barabbas tale, only this time Jesus- the protagonist- loses to highlight the cruelty of Jesus' persecutors.^[18] However, this theory too is rejected by other scholars.^[19]

Richard Carrier, argues that Barabbas is a scapegoat.^[citation needed] Though there is little evidence for a custom of releasing a prisoner, there is a well known custom of releasing one goat and sacrificing its twin as a sin offering. He argues that this section is a literary parallel to that custom.

Juda Balaam

Découverte: le manuscrit de l'Apôtre Matthias

Découvert récemment par l'archéologue hispano-israélienne Anna Mashal¹, un papyrus datant de la fin du I^{er} siècle pourrait être l'œuvre d'un premier disciple de Jésus. En très bon état de conservation, ce document présente le témoignage d'un certain « Matthias, disciple du Seigneur » racontant les faits qui se sont déroulés depuis la crucifixion du Christ jusqu'au jour de la Pentecôte. Un témoignage unique qui pourrait être l'œuvre de l'Apôtre ayant remplacé Judas (Ac 1,26) comme le pense l'archéologue.



L'apôtre Matthias, de Duccio 1308

C.A.r. : Comment ce document a-t-il été découvert ?

8

A.M. : C'est l'histoire d'un heureux hasard. Pour présenter les supports d'écriture des premiers siècles à mes étudiants, je les ai emmenés à la bibliothèque de l'université. Nous avons vu quelques exemplaires de parchemins et des papyrus. Parmi ces derniers, j'ai leur ai montré un manuscrit du V^e siècle, le P143, et comprenant les 14 premiers chapitres du livre des Actes des Apôtres. Lorsque j'ai pris le manuscrit, j'ai remarqué que celui-ci comportait des lettres effacées. Intriguée, je suis revenue le lendemain et j'ai apporté le papyrus à notre laboratoire. Nos outils ont permis de découvrir un texte primitif qui s'avérerait être un récit des événements entre Pâques et la Pentecôte.



C.A.r. : Qui est l'auteur de ce document ?

A.M. : L'œuvre se présente comme étant écrite par un certain Matthias, disciple du Seigneur, mais les œuvres pseudépigraphes sont nombreuses durant les premiers siècles. L'œuvre a le style d'une autobiographie : l'auteur parle à la première personne et décrit les événements qui se sont déroulés entre la découverte du tombeau vide et la Pentecôte. Mais le document initial devait

« écrit par un certain Matthias disciple du Seigneur.. »

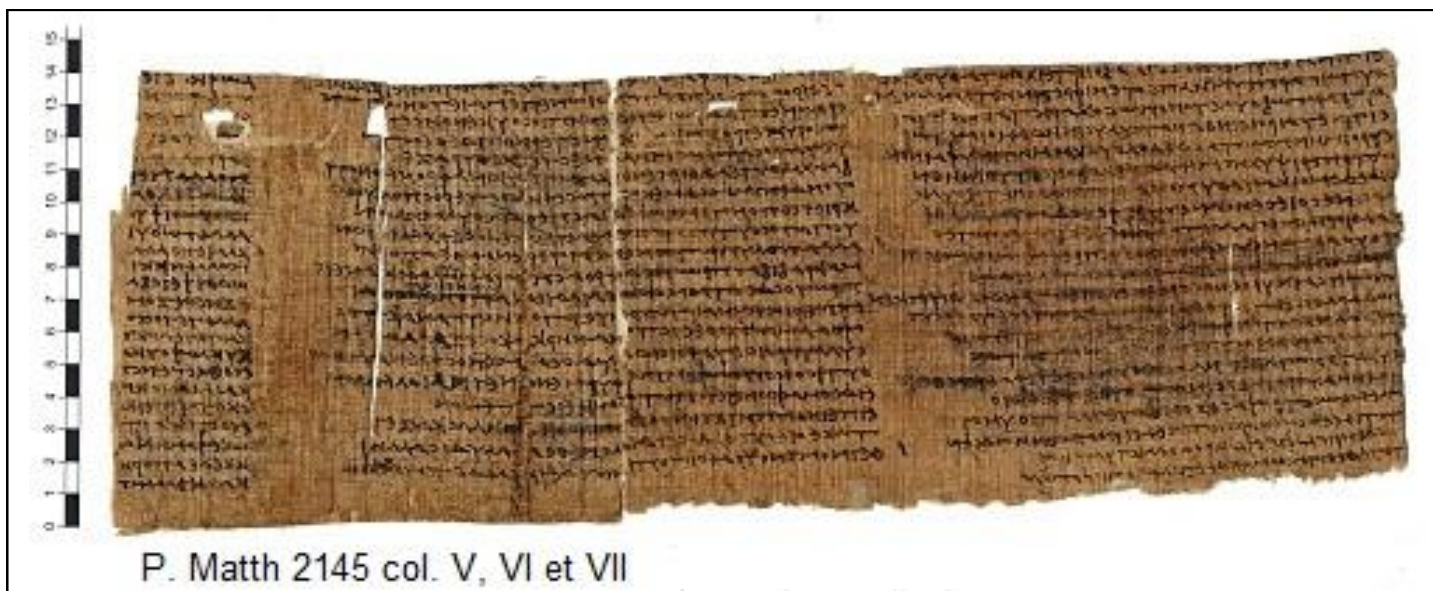
comporter des chapitres supplémentaires, sans doute sur la vie de l'Apôtre, car la dernière phrase du manuscrit est incomplète.

C.A.r. : D'où provient ce manuscrit ?

A.M. : L'analyse minérale a été effectuée par la méthode PIXE (Particle Induced X-Ray Emission) et nous a permis de dater le papyrus vers les années 70/90. La paléographie a également confirmé l'hypothèse. Le travail de restauration a sans doute été un travail déterminant à ce sujet. Nous avons utilisé l'imagerie multi-spectre pour révéler l'écriture effacée. Le texte primitif du parchemin découvert est en grec, un assez mauvais grec même ! Mais il comprend de nombreux aramaïsme. On pourrait même dire qu'il est la traduction littérale d'un document araméen plus ancien. Or ce document primitif existe, du moins en partie, il s'agit d'un fragment de papyrus écrit en araméen et mesurant environ 7cm sur 5. Jusque là ce fragment, daté des années 50 ap. J.C. était considéré comme l'extrait d'un texte profane non identifié. Or, il correspond exactement aux lignes 12 à 17 de la colonne V de notre document. On peut ainsi affirmer que le manuscrit de Matthias a été produit entre les années 45 et 55 de notre ère dans un milieu palestinien. C'est le plus ancien document chrétien découvert à ce jour.

« C'est le plus ancien document chrétien découvert à ce jour. »

¹ Anna Mashal est archéologue et enseignant le Nouveau Testament à l'Université Catholique d'Orihuela (Espagne)



Le papyrus du « Manuscrit de Matthias », bibliothèque de l'Université Catholique d'Orihuela : les colonnes 4 à 6.

C.A.r. : Peut-on affirmer qu'il s'agit de l'œuvre de l'Apôtre lui-même ?

A.M. : L'affirmer serait présomptueux. L'infirmer aussi d'ailleurs. Disons qu'entre les faits racontés (entre l'an 28 et 29) et la datation du fragment araméen (qui est peut-être lui-même l'œuvre d'un copiste), il ne s'est écoulé qu'une vingtaine d'années ! La difficulté c'est que nous ne savons rien de l'Apôtre Matthias en dehors du livre des Actes. La tradition fait de lui un juif originaire de Bethléem et qui fut lapidé à Jérusalem en raison de sa foi en Jésus-Christ. D'autres traditions font de lui l'Apôtre évangéliste de la Cappadoce, ou de la Macédoine ou encore de l'Ethiopie... Ce que nous pouvons affirmer c'est que ce document a été écrit par un judéo-chrétien palestinien de la première moitié du premier siècle. Il n'est donc pas improbable que l'auteur soit le 'treizième apôtre' Matthias dont parle les Actes des Apôtres.

C.A.r. : Ce document diffère-t-il des témoignages des évangiles et des Actes des Apôtres ?

A.M. : Par son style direct certainement. Mais, ce qui nous a surpris mon équipe et moi, c'est qu'il relate des épisodes similaires aux évangiles canoniques : la découverte du tombeau vide par les femmes, les manifestations du ressuscité à Marie de Madgala, à deux disciples, à Pierre, à Thomas... C'est pour cela que nous pensions au début à l'œuvre pseudépigraphe, essayant d'unifier les traditions

« des épisodes similaires aux évangiles.

différentes issus des évangiles. Mais la datation plus tardive des évangiles ne nous permet plus de le penser : il s'agit bien d'une œuvre originale primitive confessant Jésus-Christ Ressuscité, Fils de Dieu. Ce document nous renseigne sur la foi d'une communauté judéo-chrétienne des années 40.

C.A.r. : Certains déjà doutent quant à l'authenticité de ce document.

A.M. : Oui, et je leur donne raison. Je n'ai moi-même pas écarté l'hypothèse d'un travail de faussaire au début de mes recherches. La datation du papyrus, de l'encre et l'étude épigraphique, confirmées par la présence du papyrus araméen, ne laissent maintenant plus de doute quant à l'authenticité de ce document. Et même si je suis intimement persuadée que ce manuscrit a été écrit, à l'origine, par un disciple de la première communauté de Jérusalem, contemporain de Saint Paul, je reste prudente quant à savoir s'il s'agit d'un témoin oculaire des événements. Il serait très difficile de l'affirmer avec certitude.

« Une œuvre originale confessant Jésus-Christ Fils de Dieu.

Propos recueillis par John Doe.

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