

A Report on the Spring 2014 Meeting

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More than 150 filed into the ballroom of the Flamingo Resort Hotel in Santa Rosa on March 21 and 22 to celebrate a thirtieth year of the Westar Seminars. The third meeting of the Christianity Seminar, chaired by Nina Livesey and Bernard Brandon Scott, opened with a keynote lecture by eminent rebel archaeologist Jodi Magness, Kenan Distinguished Professor for Teaching Excellence in Early Judaism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Magness, who has participated in some twenty excavations in ancient Palestine, including Masada, Caesarea Maritima, Yotvata, and Qumran, offered a quick look at some as yet unpublished discoveries at Huqoq in Galilee that illustrate the diversity of Judaism and discombobulate the conventional consensus about how old synagogues in the land of Israel really are.

Seminar scholars, led by panelists Milton Moreland, Emily Schmidt, Dan Schowalter, and L. Michael White, and presider Joanna Dewey, next explored with Magness how the study of synagogue construction and decoration can illuminate Jewish and Christian identity formation. The remarkable Samson imagery in the Huqoq synagogue also invited the question: was messianism still strong in Judaism in the century in which that synagogue was built?

Four archaeologists presented papers at a Friday afternoon session devoted to the larger topic of how archaeology can inform the study of early Christianity. While each scholar addressed a topic specific to his or her interests, expertise, and experience in the field, and while at first glance each paper appeared to be quite distinct from the others, there are points of commonality among them. In our concluding remarks, we unearth several of those points of convergence.

Philip Harland's "Fund-raising, Collections, and Group Values in the Associations" looked at the question of how groups in the Roman world maintained and supported themselves. Material remains—in the form of inscriptions and artifacts—provide ample evidence that they had procedures for raising, collecting, and storing funds. As a col-

lective, groups decided how to use these funds. In some cases, they collected for sacred purposes, for sacrifices, temples, and dedications to the gods and goddesses. In other instances, they raised money to renovate meeting places and to help finance the cost of community meals.

In his "Architecture and Religion at the Omrit Temple Complex in Northern Israel," Dan Schowalter provided an illustrated update on the ongoing excavations of the Roman Temple Complex at Omrit. Schowalter explained that the Complex consisted of three distinct buildings, each built on top of one another in the same space. The earliest phase, dubbed by the excavators the Early Shrine, dates to around 50 BCE and was itself built on top of yet an earlier monument. The Early Shrine commemorated an unknown deity. The second phase (T1) dates to the last quarter of the first century BCE, to around 20 BCE. Its style is typical of temples dedicated to Augustus and Roma. Schowalter suggests that this Roman structure (T1) at Omrit was the site of Herod's northern Augusteum (a Roman temple dedicated to Augustus—or to one of the later emperors using that same title—and also often to Roma). While other scholars have proposed the nearby site of Baniyas for this northernmost of Herod's temples, no substantial archaeological evidence supports that alternative site. An inscription found at Omrit's Temple Complex provides strong evidence for dating the third phase (T2) to 80 CE. This last phase became necessary when the second structure (T1) suffered structural failure and it consists of an expansion of the Augusteum. The reuse of a single physical site indicates that Greco-Roman polytheism recognized sacred spaces regardless of any single group's affiliation. Indeed, within the Temple Complex there is evidence for a diversity of divinities honored during all its various building phases.

With "Shaping Jerusalem, Shaping Identity: Herod, the Flavians, and the Gospel of Mark," Emily Schmidt discussed how Herod's project of building temples to Augustus and Roma contributed to Roman identity and simultaneously forged a link to Jewish identity, thereby strengthening a connection between the two. For example, Herod

constructed his temple at the city of Sebaste on top of the ruins of Samaria, the ancient capital of Israel's Northern Kingdom. In so doing, he symbolically united the kingdoms of Israel and Judaea under himself, a Jewish king loyal to Rome. And through his expansion of the temple mount complex in Jerusalem, he greatly enhanced the prestige of the Jewish god. Yet, and as Schmidt argues, with the destruction of the temple around 70 CE by the Romans, the bond between Roman and Jewish identity became dramatically compromised. This change in Roman and Jewish relations is reflected in the Gospel of Mark, in which one sees both a symbolic exile from Jerusalem and Jesus replacing Jerusalem.

In "Moving Peter to Rome: Social Memory and Ritualized Space after 70 CE," Milton Moreland argued that with the fall of Jerusalem, Peter was in need of a new home. Second-century Christian groups solved this problem by constructing Christian narratives or myths in Rome around the idea of Peter as a martyred leader. Trauma, such as the fall of Jerusalem, and a sense of social volatility gave rise to new group identities and to the establishment of physical sites such as tombs around which to organize. Social memory was the mechanism responsible for the creation of these new group identities.

All four of these papers coalesce around the affirmation that there was a material aspect to identity formation. According to Harland, groups built cohesion and social identity through activities that involved the use and collection of funds. As both Schowalter and Schmidt argued, Herod's temples to Augustus and Roma gave rise to a strong sense of Roman imperial presence and identity. In this regard, Schowalter remarked that those responsible for building the temples at Omrit made a statement about their control of power in the region. Finally, Moreland contended that social memory itself has a material component as one of its natural outcomes. According to him, the tombs in Rome dedicated to Peter were manifestations of these newly formed identities of second-century Christians.

In the Friday evening plenary session Magness once more cast light on the use of archaeology as a tool for the historic interpretation of Christianity. By showing how sloppy scholarship led to the misidentification of the so-called "James [the brother of Jesus] Ossuary," she also highlighted how poor archaeology can lead to bogus history.

Nag Hammadi materials were the focus of the Seminar's attention in Saturday's first session, as longtime Westar Fellow Hal Taussig and newcomer Maia Kotrosits presented companion essays, "Second Century Imaginations of Social Unity" and "Social Fragmentation and Cosmic Rhetoric." Both advocated abandoning the impoverished classification "gnostic" for the Nag Hammadi materials and recommended employing those documents alongside "Christian" documents in the reconstruction of cultural identities.

While Taussig examined several Nag Hammadi texts to sort out their common themes, especially their responses to imperial violence, Kotrosits used the Book of Isaiah as a key to decoding the "theological moves" of Nag Hammadi texts.

Saturday's second session showcased Fellow L. Michael White who, as principal consultant and co-writer (not to mention on-screen commentator) for the four-hour PBS/Frontline *From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians* (1998), had already tussled with some of the formative methodological problems confronting the Seminar: What is Christianity? When did Christianity begin? Should we speak of Christianities? White had developed a four-generation model for the PBS series and refined it in his 2004 book, *From Jesus to Christianity: How Four Generations of Visionaries & Storytellers Created the New Testament and Christian Faith* (Harper-Collins), parceling out the early years into 30–70, 70–110, 110–150, 150–190 CE. The scholars rigorously tested the unconscious assumptions of White's model: How do we connect the dots if not all the dots are there? Is a linear model to be preferred over, for example, a web model? To what extent do the written artifacts reflect actual Christian acts and beliefs (consider, for example, how women were written out of early Christian documents)? Is division into generations just a convenient principle or does it have coherence? And so on.

This lively conversation was followed by a summary session, an attempt to assess what we'd learned and to keep a cumulative record of what we know, so we don't just present papers and walk away. For this, the Seminar moved away from colored-bead voting to the formulation of statements by consensus. The final list featured these statements:

- There is a material component to identity.
- The material manifestation is important to a political identity with respect to Herod and later Titus.
- Material manifestation is also important to religious identity, such as the Samson motif at Huqoq, monetary donations, sacrifices, the tomb, and synagogues themselves.
- Existing structures were reused for different purposes.
- Sacred space is recognized in Greco-Roman polytheism regardless of any single group's affiliation.
- A variety of deities were being honored in the same general site.
- An event was the impetus for the symbolic moving of Peter to Rome.
- Social memory is a mechanism for the formation of group identity.
- Herod creates a Roman identity with the building of his three temples to Augustus.

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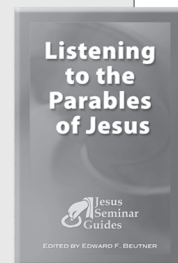
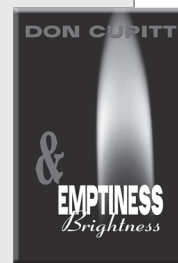
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- With Herod's enlargement of the Jewish temple complex, he not only establishes a Roman identity but also reaffirms a strong Jewish identity.
- Herod created the Jewish contribution to the imperial image.
- Roman propaganda set up Jews as the anti-Romans.
- Groups form their identities in and through giving.
- In the fifth century Jewish/Christian relations were more flexible and diverse than the rabbis or imperial decrees might indicate.
- In the Galilee and other parts of Palestine in the fourth to sixth centuries, Jews and Christians lived in separate villages. In urban areas, the populations were mixed.
- We know almost nothing about what went on in synagogues in terms of the liturgy.
- Material evidence such as furniture and placement of Torah shrines may indicate diversity in liturgy.
- The fifth-century synagogue images were engaging with the Christian message.
- Many Jews were still expecting the rebuilding of the temple.
- The Jews at Huqoq were expecting a warrior Messiah, demonstrating that this anticipation did not die out (see the Samson mosaic).
- Synagogues pre-date the fourth century, but we do not have monumental synagogue art and architecture in the land of Israel until the fourth to sixth century.
- Monumental synagogues developed alongside or at the same time as Christian monumental buildings.
- Synagogues before the fourth century were rather modest assembly buildings, not monumental buildings.
- Diaspora synagogues are not purpose-built buildings.
- The Maccabees mosaic raises a question about what writings were canonical in this period. **4R**