



The Madness of King Jesus: Why was Jesus Put to Death, but his Followers were not?

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Abstract

To argue that Jesus of Nazareth was put to death by the Roman authorities because they believed him to be a royal pretender of some kind, fails to explain satisfactorily why he was killed but his followers were not. A possible solution to this conundrum, which is supported by neglected contextual data, is that the Romans thought Jesus of Nazareth to be a deranged and deluded lunatic.

Key Words

Jesus, death, madness, king

Stating the Conundrum

‘They called me mad, and I called them mad, and damn them, they out voted me’. Nathaniel Lee.¹

That Jesus of Nazareth was put to death by the Romans on a cross is one of those rare pieces of biographical data that is almost entirely uncontested. It is, of course, multiply attested in the earliest Christian and non-Christian sources² and it was not doubted by any of the critics of the new religion.³ Crucifixion was an ignoble and unappealing end, and one that it is hard to imagine anyone in the early church would have wanted to fabricate about

1. Nathaniel Lee was a seventeenth-century dramatist who spent a number of years confined in Bedlam (Porter 1987: 3). The earliest play he had performed was entitled *Nero*.

2. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.63; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.

3. Traditions that Jesus was stoned to death by fellow Jews and then hung (*b. Sanh.* 43a) are late and probably reflect subsequent anti-Christian polemic in which Jesus was accused of having been a false prophet (Deut. 13.1-11; see also Deut. 21.21-22, *m. Sanh.* 6.4; *Toledoth Jeshu*).

their founder.⁴ The reason why he was put to death is somewhat harder to fathom. However, it is something that must be answered if we are to make any sense of the historical Jesus. As James Dunn has remarked:

In recent questioning it has been more widely recognized that a test of any hypothesis' viability is whether it provides a satisfactory answer to the question, 'Why was Jesus crucified?' To be 'historical' the historical Jesus must have been crucifiable (2003: 784).

Explanations for Jesus' execution abound, although most commentators concede that it is difficult to prove for certain the exact cause. It did not take much to end up on a cross in the empire, if you were a non-citizen and of low status. A quote from Juvenal is illustrative of the casual, summary way that an individual with the power of life or death could arrive at the decision to crucify someone they believed of no consequence.

'Crucify that slave', says the wife. 'But what crime worthy of death has he committed?', asks the husband. 'Where are the witnesses? Who informed against him? Give him a hearing at least. No delay can be too long when a man's life is at stake.' What a fool you are! Do you call a slave a man? Do you say he has done no wrong? This is my will and my command. Take it as authority for the deed (Juvenal, *Satires* 6.219ff.).

Under the rule of Pilate, ending up on a cross seems to have been a reasonably easy thing to achieve, as the governor had a reputation for repeatedly executing people without trial.⁵ So despite the importance of determining why Jesus was put to death, this may ultimately be something unknowable. It could have been decided on little more than a whim. Indeed, it could have even been an accident:

Jesus could have been one of those innocent victims who are picked up by police action at a time when peace-keeping has become difficult and the forces of law and order are over-stretched, and then arbitrarily put to death (Harvey 1982: 16).

Nonetheless, most commentators have maintained that Jesus was put to death by the Romans for a reason of some kind: he either thought of himself, or was thought of by others, to be King of the Jews. And there

4. 1 Cor. 1.18, 23; Heb. 12.2; Justin, *Apology* 1.13.4; Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.10; Augustine, *City of God* 19.23.

5. Philo, *Legat.* 302. We should remember that in the empire there was always a realm, which is evident in non legal sources, that lay 'between what is done by a law, and what is done by a lawfully appointed authority' (MacMullen 1990: 205). For example, Suetonius, *Galba* 9.1; Eusebius, *Church History* 5.1.44, 47, 50; Tertullian, *To Scapula* 4.1-4.

are, on the face of it, good grounds for holding this opinion. As Gerhard Schneider (1984: 404) observes of the earliest account of Jesus' appearance before Pilate, that of Mark, 'the messianic, or in other words, the kingly claim is...the only point of the accusation that is brought into the open' (and this is true of Matthew too, who follows Mark closely). Luke does specify the charges alluded to in Mk 15.4 and Mt. 27.13, yet once again the kingly claim is prominent amongst these: in Lk. 23.2 Jesus is accused of διαστρέφοντα τὸ ἔθνος ἡμῶν ('perverting our nation'), κωλύοντα φόρους Καίσαρι διδόναι ('forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar'), but the final accusation is that Jesus is saying that ἐαυτὸν Χριστὸν βασιλέα εἶναι ('he himself is Christ a king'). In John too the kingly claim is uppermost in the accusation: ἐὰν τοῦτον ἀπολύσῃς, οὐκ εἶ φίλος τοῦ Καίσαρος· πᾶς ὁ βασιλέα ἐαυτον ποιῶν ἀντιλέγει τῷ Καίσαρι (Jn 19.12). This common emphasis of the Gospels, when combined with the fact that all the evangelists agree that an inscription was placed on the cross which declared Jesus to be ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων (Mk 15.26; Mt. 27.37; Lk. 23.38; Jn 19.19, 21), a decidedly Roman rather than Jewish or early Christian expression (Bammel 1984; Brown 1994: 962-968), makes this explanation seem all the more reasonable.⁶

All this, I imagine, is fairly uncontroversial, but there is a conundrum and one that is reasonably well known but not one that I believe has been very convincingly solved. If Jesus was put to death by the Romans as a royal pretender, why were none of his followers killed or even pursued? This is a paradox, right at the heart of current reconstructions of the historical Jesus. So, for example, Sanders (1985: 317) observes:

[W]e recall the surest facts: Jesus was executed by the Romans; his disciples were not rounded up and executed. In addition it was highly probable that he was executed for sedition or treason, as would-be king.

From everything that we know of Roman policy concerning the treatment of royal pretenders or leaders of seditious movements, this failure to kill Jesus' followers, or even pursue them, is perplexing to say the least. New Testament scholars are familiar enough with the accounts of Theudas and the Egyptian.⁷ Although the information that we possess about these figures raises a number of critical problems that do not need to be

6. The expression used by the mockers in Mk 15.32 (ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰσραὴλ) would have been a more appropriate way for a Jewish person to describe the kingly claims associated with Jesus.

7. Theudas: Josephus, *Ant.* 20.97-98; Acts 5.36-37. The Egyptian: Josephus, *J.W.* 2.261, *Ant.* 20.171; Acts 21.38.

rehearsed here, one detail seems clear of both cases: the Roman forces made a point of slaughtering large numbers of their followers. The same, of course, occurred with the Samaritan prophet during the rule of Pilate. As Josephus says, having already killed a number of the prophet's supporters in an attack, 'many prisoners were taken, of whom Pilate put to death the principal leaders and those who were most influential among the fugitives' (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.85-87). A similar fate seems to have befallen the followers of the royal pretender Simon of Peraea in 4 BCE.⁸ Indeed, if we throw our net a little more widely, we find the same pattern of behaviour by the Roman authorities when faced with comparable leaders and movements elsewhere. For example, in the case of the slave king Eunus-Antiochus, the wonder-working Syrian who claimed that Atargatis-Astarte had promised him a crown,⁹ or Tacfarinas the charismatic north African rebel leader (Tacitus, *Annals* 2-4), or Mariccus, the Gallic god-man (Tacitus, *Histories* 2.61), or the insurgent general Anicetus of Pontus (Tacitus, *Histories* 3.48-49), the common practice seems to have been that not only would a seditious leader be killed (if caught), but his followers, or at least those prominent amongst them, would be executed or enslaved.¹⁰ Indeed, the killing of bandit leaders and their associates was something played out again and again in the *Laureolus*. In this notorious and hugely popular mime (Gaius apparently saw it on the day of his assassination) it was not unusual to have condemned men play the victims, and the stage and audience were often literally awash with blood.¹¹

It is important at this point to note that we are dealing here with Roman behaviour towards royal pretenders and seditious leaders, and what we can determine of imperial policy and practice, and so the example of John the Baptist is, for our purposes, irrelevant: he was not killed by the Romans but on the orders of Herod Antipas. Even if Josephus's description of Herod Antipas's motivation in having John executed is correct, we would, in any case, be dealing with the killing of a potential threat and not

8. Josephus, *J.W.* 2.57-59, *Ant.* 17.273-77; Tacitus, *Histories* 5.9.2. Tacitus is clear that the campaign against Simon of Peraea was directed by the Roman governor of Syria, and it seems the best explanation for the participation of Roman soldiers in the events as recounted by Josephus.

9. Diodorus Siculus, *Library* 34/35.2.1-48.

10. See Grünewald 2004 for the most recent and comprehensive treatment of such figures.

11. For the *Laureolus* mime, see Bonaria 1955: 112. Josephus, *Ant.* 19.94; Suetonius, *Caligula* 57.2.

someone who declared himself or was declared by others a king or rebel leader.¹²

The determination of the Romans to destroy followers as well as those who led them is hardly surprising, particularly given the characteristic importance of deterrence in explanations and justifications of punishment in Roman law more generally. As Quintillian observed:

[W]henver we crucify criminals, the most heavily used routes are chosen where the greatest number of people can watch and be influenced by this threat; for every penalty is aimed not so much at the offense as at its exemplary value.¹³

The notion that the Roman authorities would kill a royal pretender but not bother to persecute those who publicly supported him, as a warning to others, seems to go against what we can discern of both the general practice and principles of Roman rule.

All of this really should in fact make us question whether the Romans executed Jesus because they took the kingly claims made by him, or about him, seriously. Yet, as I have stated, this is exactly what most New Testament scholars seem to argue. For example, N.T. Wright (1996: 544) maintains that 'Jesus was executed as a rebel against Rome', Dunn (2003: 629) states, 'Jesus was executed as a threat (messianic pretender) to Rome's hold over Jerusalem', A.E. Harvey (1982: 14) claims, 'Jesus was convicted and executed on a charge of sedition against the Roman authority' and Paula Fredriksen (2000: 241) says that Pilate executed Jesus 'specifically as a political insurrectionist'. Of course, some raise the possibility that the Romans did not think Jesus presented much of a danger. As Joel Green (2001: 96) puts it: 'In its arrogance Rome may regard Jesus' ministry and message as harmless, but, in the end, it cannot overlook the threat of civil unrest'. Similar qualifications are indeed made by Wright (1996: 544), Dunn (2003: 629), Fredriksen (2000: 251) and E.P. Sanders (1985: 295) amongst others. Yet, for all this, it is important to remember that such scholars do believe that Jesus was publicly executed as some kind of threat to Roman rule, a kingly pretender of some sort. Even if, as Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn suggested (1982: 736), Jesus' execution was a

12. See Josephus, *Ant.* 18.116-19; Mk 6.17-29; Mt. 14.3-12; Lk. 3.19-20. It is always possible that the disciples of John were persecuted, although the evidence is admittedly slim: it might explain the rapid emergence of a diaspora of followers of John evident in Acts of the Apostles (Acts 18.25 [Alexandria] and 19.1-7 [Ephesus]) and, rather more speculatively, the traditions about the fate of the 360 prophets of John in early Mandaean literature (see Lupieri 2002: 147).

13. Quintillian, *Declamationes maiores* 274.13. See Coleman 1990: 48-49.

result of a misunderstanding of his ministry on the part of the Romans—if they mistook him for a rebel leader and had him executed as such—we are still left with the problem of why they ignored his disciples.

It really will not do to try and solve the conundrum, as Sanders has suggested (1985: 318), by arguing that only Jesus was executed because Pilate was responding to direct pressure from some of the Jewish authorities who had a problem with Jesus alone or simply failed to convince Pilate that his followers posed a danger. This solution would still leave us with a Roman governor apparently happy to be seen to execute someone publicly as a kingly pretender and also happy to be seen to leave the followers of this kingly pretender, every single one of them, for the subsequent six years during which he held this office, untroubled. For Sanders to be right, we would have to assume that Pilate did not behave, nor wish to be seen to behave, as Roman governors always seem to have behaved in such circumstances. This is all the odder given Pilate's reputation as someone who was robust, to say the least, when it came to being seen to exert Roman authority.¹⁴ If anything, we would expect Pilate to go too far the other way and over-react to threats real or otherwise, as he eventually did with the Samaritan prophet.

So how can this conundrum be solved? I would like to suggest that there is one possible solution that is historically defensible, and makes sense within the first-century cultural context, but has yet to be considered: the Roman authorities did not believe that Jesus was a kingly pretender of any real kind. Instead they thought him insane. If Pilate had Jesus put to death because he believed that Jesus thought himself to be a king of some sort, but did not pursue his followers, then Pilate cannot have thought of Jesus as aspiring to be a king in any meaningful sense, publicly or privately, nor someone who could reasonably be thought a king by anyone else. The Romans executed Jesus of Nazareth because they thought they were disposing of a deluded lunatic. Not only does this solve this famous conundrum but, once the details of Jesus' treatment at the hands of the Romans are examined in the light of what we know of the treatment in Graeco-Roman culture of low status individuals deemed insane, the solution becomes all the more compelling.

The Madness of Jesus

Of course, the accusation that Jesus was mad is hardly new. Mark's Gospel provides us with the early tradition that Jesus' own family thought

14. Philo, *Legat.* 302f. See also Josephus, *J.W.* 2.169-77; *Ant.* 18.55-64, 85-89.

him so and even went so far as to try to restrain him (Mk 3.19b-21). They had good reason to think as much. All the Gospels contain the accusation that Jesus was possessed (Mk 3.22; Mt. 12.24; Lk. 11.14; Jn 8.48), a judgment that could be taken as amounting to more or less the same thing¹⁵—although not necessarily so.¹⁶ Indeed, John's Gospel even records a tradition that Jesus was thought to be suicidal (Jn 8.22)—not in itself evidence of insanity but something that could be thought to indicate as much.¹⁷ The accusation that he was a drunkard,¹⁸ even a false prophet,¹⁹ could legitimately be seen as evidence that he was thought deranged by his contemporaries. Even the tradition that Jesus on occasion sought solitude for extended periods, as evidenced in the temptation narratives,²⁰ could be construed as a sign of lunacy. As Aretaeus of Cappadocia, the first-century medical writer, remarked, some sufferers of mania 'flee the haunts of men, and going to the wilderness, live by themselves...' (*Causes and Symptoms of Chronic Diseases* 1.6). However, what I want to argue here is not that the historical Jesus' family and some of his co-religionists thought him mad (it seems pretty certain that they did), but that there are good grounds to suppose that the Roman authorities believed him to be insane, and that this, to a significant extent, is evident in their treatment of him and can explain his death.

I venture to say anything about the death of the historical Jesus with some trepidation. It is hardly the most obscure area of New Testament

15. See, for example, Mk 5.1-20; Aretaeus, *Causes and Symptoms of Chronic Diseases* 1.6; *T. Sol.* 18.30.

16. We must be careful not to assume that individuals in the first century thought afflictions, even of this kind, necessarily had a demonic aetiology. See Amundsen and Ferngren 1995: 2950.

17. See, for example, Caelius Aurelianus, *Chronic Diseases* 1.155. Although Caelius Aurelianus practised in the fifth century CE, this book is a Latin translation of Soranus's second-century CE work. Interestingly, suicides in the Hebrew Bible are never depicted as the result of mental illness but rational choice. As Fred Rosner (1995: 276) remarks after surveying all the cases, 'Each knew what lay ahead if he remained alive, namely, a prolonged, torturous martyrdom and/or disgrace to the God of Israel'.

18. 'Madness and insanity are often the result of drunkenness', Caelius Aurelianus, *Chronic Diseases* 1.175. For the link between drunkenness and madness in antiquity, see Pliny, *Natural History* 4.137-42; Herodotus, *Histories* 6.84; Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 9.8.2.

19. For the association of prophecy with madness, see Jer. 29.26; Hos. 9; Josephus, *J.W.* 6.300-305; Caelius Aurelianus, *Chronic Diseases* 1.150; a useful recent discussion of this can be found in Nasrallah 2003.

20. Mt. 4.1-11; Mk 1.12-13; Lk. 4.1-13.

research. Indeed, as we will see, some of the primary texts that will be brought into the discussion have long been known about, although their significance has been understood in a rather different manner to that argued for here. The parallels between the mocking of Jesus and that of the treatment of the unfortunate madman Carabas recounted in Philo were, for example, noted by Hugo Grotius as long ago as 1641. My thesis might also appear ‘excessively original’, in the words Ben F. Meyer (1994: 339) has used to dismiss some recent contributions to the study of the historical Jesus—a sobering criticism, if ever there were one. I am especially wary as I do not know much about many of the things vital to my argument, although this is not entirely my fault. As Fergus Millar (1999: 247) put it, in his seminal article on the world of Apuleius’s *Golden Ass*: ‘Those who study and teach the history of the ancient world suffer from a great disadvantage, which we find it difficult to admit even to ourselves; in a perfectly literal sense we do not know what we are talking about.’ The need for New Testament scholars to display a more thoroughgoing agnosticism on historical matters, and to eschew the infectious but misleading confidence that so often characterizes our reconstructions, is something that I have pleaded for on a number of occasions elsewhere (Meggitt 2004), so I will not pursue it further here. Suffice to say, although I believe that what follows is plausible, and I believe sheds some new light on this most studied of subjects, I would be the first to admit that there is much that just cannot be known about these events.

A Slight but Important Digression: Was Jesus actually Mad?

Before beginning to make my case, it is important that I clarify what this article is not about. It is not about whether the historical Jesus actually suffered from a mental illness of some kind in an objective sense. Odd though it might appear to many in the field, New Testament scholars have, from time to time, ventured to make judgments on Jesus’ sanity.²¹ Indeed, no less a figure than Albert Schweitzer dedicated a book to this subject, *Die psychiatrische Beurteilung Jesu: Darstellung und Kritik* (1913; ET 1948) motivated, in part, it seems, by his own sense of responsibility for the growth of publications in the early twentieth century that declared Jesus to be mad. As he noted, his influential work on the historical Jesus ‘portrayed a Jesus whose object world looked like a structure of fantasies’ (1948: 27). It seemed to him that, as a result of his own writings, others believed that the ‘paranoia of the Jewish Messiah had

21. For a survey of this, see Meggitt forthcoming.

been proved' (1948: 74). (Schweitzer's study gave the historical Jesus a more or less clean bill of mental health [1948: 72].)

In saying that this article is not about whether Jesus actually was mad, by any objective criteria (if such things exist), I would like to make it clear that I am not saying that it is illegitimate to try to investigate the psychology of the historical Jesus, something that I have argued at more length elsewhere (Meggitt forthcoming). It is customary for scholars to reject this undertaking. Günther Bornkamm (1960: 24), for example, judged it 'doomed to failure' and contributors to the so-called Third Quest, such as Wright, have said much the same (1996: 479). Most are dismissive²² because they believe that the evidence that we have is not of the kind that can sustain psychological scrutiny, and the work produced by those who have, in recent years, tried to do just this, such as John Miller (1997) and Donald Capps (2000, 2004), has done little to convince them otherwise. Despite severe reservations, I do not share this pessimism. Indeed, what Peter Gay (1985: 6) has said of historians in general is also true of New Testament scholars: 'The professional historian has always been a psychologist—an amateur psychologist'. For all their stated reticence, it is hard to find a scholar of the historical Jesus who has not had something to say about such things as Jesus' 'self-understanding' and applied assumptions about human psychology (however limited and poorly articulated) in making their judgments. An example from Sanders' influential *Jesus and Judaism* will suffice to illustrate my point here. Although noting that the interpretation amongst his followers of Jesus' death as atoning (1985: 324) appears to have been 'immediate and thorough', he nonetheless finds it implausible that these traditions could have originated with the historical Jesus because:

When pushed to its limit, this view means that Jesus determined in his own mind to be killed and to have his death understood as sacrificial for others, and it must then imply that he pulled this off by provoking the authorities. It is not historically impossible that Jesus was weird and I realise that my own interpretation of his views may make twentieth-century people look at him askance. But the view that he plotted his own redemptive death makes him strange in any century and thrusts the entire drama into his peculiar inner psyche. The other things that we know about him make him a reasonable first-century visionary. We should be guided by them...²³

22. It remains an issue more likely to be addressed in philosophical theology than biblical studies. See, for example, Davis 2002 and Daniel Howard-Snyder 2004.

23. Sanders 1985: 333. Given the likely influence of ideas found in texts such as

For all of the problems, it is high time that scholars of the historical Jesus became rather less averse to psychology. At the very least it might make them more critically aware of the psychological assumptions operative in judgments such as this, which at present go largely unexamined.

Making Sense of Madness

It is also necessary, before we venture any further, to say something about the initial problems raised by attempting to study anything to do with madness in the ancient world. There are at least two major difficulties that face us. Firstly, little work is being done on this subject. Although there are some fine and ostensibly comprehensive studies of Roman medicine, such as those by Jacques André (1987), Audrey Cruse (2004), Ralph Jackson (1991) and Vivian Nutton (2004), and a range of excellent works on the history of diseases in antiquity, notably that of Mirko Grmek (1989), these authors make virtually no reference to mental disorders. Studies of perceptions of disease and illness in antiquity, such as Geoffrey Lloyd's recent monograph on the subject (2003), and interpretations of deformity and disability in Graeco-Roman culture, such as that by Robert Garland (1995), have little of relevance to say, either directly or indirectly. To date, what work there has been on this issue has been rather limited in its focus (for our purposes) and has concentrated on either literary concerns—such as Deborah Hershkowitz's examination of the role of madness in epic (1998), or the study of women in antiquity, such as Mary Lefkowitz and Maureen Fant (2005), and Rebecca Flemming (2000) (who have made much of the gendered notions of rationality evident in the assumptions of Graeco-Roman medical writers). There have been some studies of specific works of Greek and Roman medical authors that appear to touch directly on this subject, such as the Hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease*, a book that contests the divine origin of an illness that seems to resemble what we would call epilepsy, but these (see, for example, Laskaris 2002) do not reveal much of relevance for us. There has been no concerted and comprehensive attempt to study insanity in antiquity.²⁴ This is an unusual lacuna in scholarship, particularly given

2 Macc. 7.37-38, it is questionable how 'strange' such a conviction would seem.

24. This despite the growing sophistication of study of other forms of illness in the Roman Empire. See, for example Baker and Carr 2002. There have, of course, also been works speculating about the sanity of notorious emperors and other celebrities in antiquity. For a fascinating examination of trends in assessing the personality of perhaps the most notorious 'mad' emperor, see Yavetz 1996.

Michel Foucault's influential history of madness, *Folie et déraison: histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1961). Indeed, given the significant effect his *Histoire de la sexualité* (1984) has had upon the direction of subsequent scholarship in Classics (e.g. Larmer *et al.* 1998; Goldhill 1995), this is all the more surprising. The most comprehensive treatment of madness in the ancient world remains the early sections of George Rosen's *Madness in Society: Chapters in the Historical Sociology of Mental Illness* (1968)²⁵ which is now almost 40 years old and has evident weaknesses. Although there are probably many reasons for this state of affairs, such as the fact that most mental disorders leave no direct mark on the skeletal record,²⁶ one hopes we will not have to wait too long for this to be rectified.

A second difficulty that faces us is that the phenomenon of mental illness is a difficult thing to discuss in any period or culture. Those deemed 'mad' in our primary sources display a wide variety of behavioural abnormalities. A multiplicity of technical terms were also employed and these often seem to overlap with each other, and it is clear that those using them often had very different notions about what might be being discussed. The term *μανία* was regularly used in Greek sources of our period, and although it was generally distinguished from *φρενίτις* (a mental disturbance usually accompanied by a fever) and *ἐπιληψία* (erratic behaviour caused by some form of seizure), it was a catchall term that could include a vast range of different problems that, at least from the lay perspective, were somehow all related.²⁷ In Lucian's *The Disinherited*, for example, the doctor son who has been disowned by his father for refusing to treat his stepmother (whom he judges to be beyond medical help) complains:

My father expects all attacks of insanity (*μανία*) in all bodies to be alike and their treatment the same... Madness (*μανία*) itself has a thousand

25. The only volume dedicated solely to this subject is the somewhat antiquated one of Vaughan (1919).

26. This is a problem that affects the study of mental illness in particular but also hinders the more general study of disability in antiquity. As Morag Cross (1999: 7) observes, 'It is very easy for an archaeological discussion of disability to consist of the bare bones of a history of the orthopaedic ward'. See also Molleson 1999. The enormous difficulty in making sense of what material remains we do possess is seen in the influential article of Dettwyler (1991). There are, of course, other factors too, and it is hard not to agree with with Mike Oliver's complaint (1990: xi): 'the issue of disability and the experiences of disabled people have been given scant consideration in academic circles. Both the issue and the experience have been marginalised.'

27. See Cicero's complaint about the lack of precision in Greek terms used to describe madness (*Tuscan Disputations* 3.5).

forms, numberless causes, and even some distinct names. Delusion (παρανοεΐν), eccentricity (παραπαΐειν), frenzy (λυττᾶν), and lunacy (μεμηγῆναι) are not the same thing, but are all names that signify whether one is more or less in the grip of the disease (*The Disinherited* 27, 30).

But we too find it hard to talk about insanity with any precision. We also use terms such as ‘mad’ or ‘mentally ill’ in English to refer to a massive range of human experiences and behaviours, from mild depression to paranoid schizophrenia. It is unsurprising because, as Roy Porter (1987: 8) notes, ‘It is important to remember that even today we possess no rational consensus upon the nature of mental illness—what it is, what causes it, what will cure it’. Just as it is notoriously hard to define ‘health’ (Boyd 2000), it is a maddeningly elusive thing to define ‘insanity’. Indeed The American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*, perhaps the most influential reference work on the classification of mental disorders, and used regularly in clinical contexts, begins, somewhat unnervingly, by noting: ‘Although this manual provides a classification of mental disorders, it must be admitted that no definition adequately specifies precise boundaries for the concept of “mental disorder”...’ (1994: 1).

This difficulty in talking about insanity is, in part, a consequence of madness being culturally constructed. Wherever one places oneself in current debates about the fundamental nature of human ill health, and the relationship between the physical experience of disease and social experience of illness, it is fair to assume that most would agree that to suffer from a mental disorder is also not quite the same thing as suffering from a fracture. Although all ailments are, to some degree, culturally, as well as biologically, determined (that is, it is one thing to have Hansen’s disease, to experience the gradual destruction of your nervous system; it is quite another to suffer the social death that is the illness of leprosy), ‘madness’ seems especially so. As Rosen (1968: 90) puts it:

Whether or not a person is considered mentally ill depends on the degree to which his behaviour is disturbed, and the attitude of the members of his social group towards deviant behaviour. In this sense mental disorder is perhaps even more intimately dependent on social factors than is physical illness.

We really cannot underestimate the significance of human culture in perceptions and experience of mental illness.²⁸ To put it crudely, culture

28. Here I am assuming Peter Burke’s (1978: xi) definition of culture as ‘a system

determines what symptoms are taken as indicative of mental illness, what label is given to a sufferer, and how such an illness is explained and treated by other members of society. Culture determines what actions or beliefs are regarded as deviant, and whether these are labelled mad or bad, or of no particular interest one way or the other. Even the content of madness is, in some sense culturally shaped. When a condition has a clearly organic basis, such as neurosyphilis, delirium tremens, cerebral malaria or dementia, the sufferer's 'perceptions and behaviour, the content of their hallucinations or delusions, and the attitudes of others towards them' are shaped by cultural factors (Helman 2000: 171). As Porter (1987: 5) insightfully remarks: 'Even the mad are men [or women] of their times'. The degree to which most critics would confirm that madness is culturally constructed, more than other forms of illness, means that it is something that can be contested between cultures. As Ruth Benedict long ago observed, behaviour that could be considered abnormal, a sign of neurosis or psychosis in one culture, might be highly valued or acceptable in another (Benedict 1934).

The culturally constructed nature of madness is evident in its uses. Because of the peculiar malleability of the idea of 'madness' in society, and the fact that it is often a label for deviance, it is especially vulnerable to reflecting and enforcing the dominant ideas and relationships of power. Accusations of 'madness', like those of 'badness' or 'magic', can function as ideological means of control—intentionally or unintentionally. For example, when it was proposed in 1864 to admit women to London University degrees, one opponent went on record to say, in all seriousness, that: 'Fears have been expressed that if girls were encouraged to use their brains, the excitement caused thereby might produce insanity' (Dunsheath and Miller 1958: 54). The recognition that accusations of madness can have a clear ideological function has been carried to its logical conclusion by proponents of the Anti-Psychiatry Movement, who argue that much of mental illness is simply a social construction, a euphemism for behaviours that are disapproved of, created by psychiatrists who act as powerful agents of social control—the kind of analysis found, for example, in the controversial work of Thomas Szasz.²⁹

Given this, it is no surprise that 'in practice, the dividing line between sanity and insanity is not always easily established' (Rosen 1968: 102).

of shared meaning and value, and the symbolic forms (performances, artefacts) in which they are expressed or embodied'.

29. See, for example, Szasz 1963, 1972. For a critical survey of the movement and its assumptions, see Tantam 1991.

For example, Josephus wrote that he was not sure if the behaviour of the Sicarii under torture, in refusing to admit that Caesar was their Lord, should be called courage or madness (ἀπόνοια; Josephus, *J.W.* 7.417-18). Similarly, it was not clear whether the peripatetic doctor Menecrates, who claimed to be divine, called himself Zeus, and dressed up as the god, was mad or not. According to Athenaeus, Menecrates used his skill in medicine:

to compel those whom he cured of the so-called sacred diseases to sign a bond that they would obey him as his slaves if they were restored to health. And one man who became his attendant wore the dress and went by the name of Heracles... Another attendant with the riding-cloak and herald's staff and wings besides, was called Hermes...another Apollo... Still another of his patients who had been restored to health moved about in his company clad in the garb of Asclepius. As for Zeus himself, dressed in purple, with a gold crown on his head and carrying a sceptre, his feet shod with slippers, he walked about attended by his divine choir.³⁰

Menecrates' opinions were quoted in medical texts of the period, despite the fact that at least one recipient of his unsolicited letters responded to his demand that he be recognized as Zeus by advising him to take a dose of hellebore (a plant noted as effective in the treatment of the insane). As Rosen notes, 'an individual who believed himself to be a god incarnate did not stand out quite as sharply in society or appear quite as alien as he would today' (Rosen 1968: 104).

Perceptions and Responses to Madness

Having briefly sketched the problems that face anyone trying to understand madness in antiquity, we can now turn back to the first century. Before looking more directly at the details of Jesus' treatment by the Romans, it is necessary to examine the range of understandings and responses to madness within first-century pagan cultures,³¹ and more specifically the culture of Pilate, a minor aristocrat of equestrian rank,³² probably from

30. See Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 7.33-34. The translation is from Temkin 1971: 14.

31. 'The Roman empire did not consist of a homogeneous culture, but of numerous societies with different beliefs and understandings about their world and how it functioned' (Baker 2002: 23).

32. For the likelihood that Pontius Pilate was an equestrian rather than a freedman (as was the governor Felix), see Bond 1998: 9. Pilate's *nomen gentile* indicates that he was probably from the tribe of the Pontii of Samnium in Italy.

Italy, and the cultures of those involved directly in the crucifixion of Jesus—the Syrio-Palestinian auxiliaries (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.204; 19.365). Literary and theatrical depictions were probably influential in shaping and reflecting the assumptions of both, albeit in somewhat different ways. From what we know of the continued popularity of his writings across the empire in our period, Homer's depictions of the mad can tell us much about the perceptions of many of its inhabitants.³³ For Homer, mental states in humans have their origins outside of a person, and mental disturbances come from the gods themselves (although characters can have internal conflicts, they are generally between one impulse and another, or one part of the body and another, and are not the cause of insanity). Homer's Bellerophon became the classic example of just such an afflicted individual—wandering alone, persecuted and driven insane by the gods.³⁴ Likewise, Ajax's temporary madness in Sophocles' play of that name (*Ajax* 581-82) and that of Heracles, in Euripides' play the *Madness of Heracles*,³⁵ or the worshippers of Dionysus in his work *The Bacchae* (see Beta 1999), were probably influential, as were the depictions found in popular Roman New Comedy, such as Plautus's *Menaechmi*. These present a similar notion of madness as that of Homer (although we begin to see the interest in organic and naturalistic explanations of mental illness, where imbalances in humours, and circumstances, rather than gods or their intermediaries, drive people mad).³⁶ These depictions were well known, not just through the presentation of these plays in antiquity, but also, from what we can tell, through the popularized and bowdlerized versions of them that seem to have been common in mime (which was not mute but a kind of knockabout slapstick and was by far the most dominant theatrical form in the first-century eastern empire). In mime, the physical abuse of the *μωρός* (fool) is a recurring and prominent motif (Welborn 2005: 39).

However, the most extensive discussions of mental illness are, of course, to be found in medical writers of the period. The popular currency of such medical ideas is difficult to determine, and the undifferentiated understanding of *μανία* displayed by the father in Lucian's *The Disinherited*

33. For the enduring popularity of Homer, see Lamberton 1997, Farrell 2004 and Kenney 1982.

34. See Homer, *Iliad* 6.200-202; Pseudo-Aristotle 30.

35. See also Seneca, *Hercules Furens*.

36. See, for example, the doctor's remarks when faced with an apparently mad patient: 'num laruatust aut cerritus?' ('possession or hallucination?'). Plautus, *Menaechmi* 890 (5.4.2).

probably typified the thinking of most people. Nonetheless, some writers such as Aulus Cornelius Celsus did present medical ideas to a wider, educated audience through the popular genre of the encyclopaedia, and their writings may well tell us something relevant about perceptions and treatments of those deemed mentally ill by a man such as Pilate.³⁷ Celsus, for example, declares that true madness has a discernible onset and is delusional:

[I]nsanity is really there when a continuous dementia begins, when the patient, although up till then in his senses, yet entertains certain vain imaginings; the insanity becomes established when the mind becomes at the mercy of such imaginings (*De Medicina* 3.18.3).

He also tells us something about the range of forms of mental impairment and notes how even those who appear sane are really mad if their actions indicate as much:

There are several sorts of insanity; for some among insane persons are sad, others hilarious; some are more readily controlled and rave in words only, others are rebellious and act with violence; and of these latter, some only do harm by impulse, others are artful too, and show the most complete appearance of sanity while seizing occasion for mischief, but they are detected by the result of their acts... (*De Medicina* 3.18.3).

Celsus gives us an indication of the diversity of common practices amongst those who wished to try to restore the insane to rational life, and has sufficient resources for such an undertaking. Although some treatments were humane, involving dietetics (Grant 2000), blood-letting (Brain 1986),³⁸ drugs³⁹ and even interventions that resemble some contemporary psychotherapeutic practices,⁴⁰ and others, such as incubation in temples (Papageorgiou 1975) and exorcism (Bonner 1943)⁴¹ and the use of incan-

37. Celsus wrote his encyclopaedia during the reign of Tiberius, the medical section of which has survived and contains a sustained discussion of mental disorders. See Spivak 1991 and Schulze 2001.

38. For example, Galen 11.288-91K.

39. There are, for example, 45 remedies for epilepsy in Dioscorides' influential first-century CE work *De Materia Medica*. See Lucian, *The Disinherited* 4.

40. 'Diseases of the soul are more harmful and numerous than the diseases of the body... Without question there is a medicine for the soul, philosophy, whose help must not be sought externally, as with diseases of the body, and we must exert ourselves with all our resources and strength so that we ourselves are able to heal ourselves.' Cicero, *Tuscan Disputations* 3.3. See also Celsus, *De Medicina* 3.18.11.

41. See Mk 5.1-20; Mt. 8.28-34; Lk. 8.26-39.

tations and amulets (Waegeman, 1987)⁴² probably did no harm to sufferers, some common interventions were extremely physically and psychologically distressing. As Celsus notes, ‘If it is the mind that deceives the madman, he is best treated by certain tortures’ (*De Medicina* 3.18.21). It was, for example, common practice to bind the mentally ill:

Those who conduct themselves more violently it is expedient to fetter, lest they should do harm either to themselves or to others. Anyone so fettered, although he talks rationally and pitifully when he wants his fetters removed, is not to be trusted, for that is a madman’s trick.⁴³

Such practices are referred to by Paul of Aegina and numerous others.⁴⁴ It was also common to assume that violence could bring some people back to their senses. Just as Heracles had been restored to his senses by Athena throwing a ‘sanity stone’ at him,⁴⁵ those judged to be suffering from delusions were particularly prone to such treatment and were often beaten to restore them to their right mind. As Celsus remarks:

If, however, it is the mind that deceives the madman, he is best treated by certain tortures. When he says or does anything wrong, he is to be coerced by starvation, fetters and flogging... To be terrified suddenly and to be thoroughly frightened is beneficial in this illness and so, in general, is anything which strongly agitates the spirit...

Starvation was also a regular weapon in the therapeutic armoury for those who refused to respond to treatment (Celsus, *De Medicina* 3.18.21). Those deemed mad ran the serious risk of being killed by the therapy itself.

Of course, most of those suffering from *μανία* did not receive medical treatment at all,⁴⁶ and our knowledge of their fate comes to us only indirectly. From what we can determine, the best most could hope for would be confinement by their families, who had primary responsibility for them (as in the case of Jesus and his family in Mk 3.19b-21).⁴⁷ How-

42. See Cyranides 1.24.80-82.

43. Celsus, *De Medicina* 3.18.4. See also Caelius Aurelianus, *Chronic Diseases* 172; Achilles Tattius, *Leucippe and Clitophon* 4.9; Rosen 1968: 130; Mk 5.3-4; Lk. 8.29.

44. See Rosen 1968: 100. Such a fate befell the paradigmatic madman of antiquity, Cleomenes of Sparta (Herodotus, *Histories* 6.75).

45. Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 9.11.2.6.

46. It should not be assumed that there was any expectation in first-century cultures that those suffering from *μανία* could or should be cured. See Dols 1988: 247.

47. For example, the *Laws of the Twelve Tables* 4.4 (Cicero, *Tuscan Disputations* 3.5). For the cultural significance of the Twelve Tables, see Cicero, *On the Orator* 1.44. Indeed, confinement seems to have been a legal obligation in Roman law. See

ever, to judge from the ubiquity of the insane in literary evidence of the time, it seems many were abandoned and left to fend for themselves,⁴⁸ wandering about,⁴⁹ vulnerable to assault. ‘In antiquity, the mentally disordered became objects of ridicule, scorn or abuse, and remained public butts for the amusement of the populace’ (Rosen 1968: 88).⁵⁰ They were ‘teased, chased, pelted with clods or subjected to other indignities’ (Rosen 1968: 100). The mentally ill seem to have feared the regular, random violence of the wider population.⁵¹ It was customary to spit on the mad⁵² and to throw stones at them (probably for apotropaic reasons). One of the *Advocati* in Plautus’s *Poenulus*, for example, refused to run through the streets for fear that he would be thought mad and that people would do exactly that.⁵³ Children and youths seem to have been both the deranged’s closest associates and their most persistent persecutors.⁵⁴ There is some evidence that, within some cultures of the empire, the mentally ill even functioned as ritual ‘scapegoats’, as *pharmakoi*—although we should not

Rosen 1968: 127. See also Plato, *Laws* 11. 929 and Braude 1959: 410.

48. For example, Philo, *Flaccus* 36–41; Aelian, *Varia Historia* 4.25—although in this case a brother eventually intervened. Those remaining in the control of families did have ‘rights’ of a kind. See, for example, Justinian, *Digest* 1.18.14.

49. For example, Artemidorus tells us that for a poor man to dream of singing songs in the marketplace or streets is a premonition of madness—as that is how the mad behaved (*Oneirocritica* 1.76). Similarly, it is auspicious to dream of being insane if you are sick because the insane walk around (*Oneirocritica* 3.42). Indeed, in the Talmud we find a dispute over the definition of insanity in which it is argued that someone should be categorized as mad for the purposes of judging their legal capacity if they are ‘[o]ne who goes out (that is roams about) alone at night, who sleeps in cemeteries, who tears his clothes’ (*b. Hag.* 3b–4a). Aretaeus, *Causes and Symptoms of Chronic Diseases* 1.6.

50. For examples, see Phaedrus, *Aesopic Fables* 3.14.1–3; Plato, *Euthryphro* 3 C; Philo, *Flaccus* 36–38. The popularity of ‘fools’ as the butts of humour can be seen in *The Philogelos*, a jokebook in which an idiot Σχολαστικός is the main protagonist (see Baldwin 1983).

51. Or in some cultures, rather more systematic violence. See Strabo, *Geography* 11.4.7. Strabo tells us that amongst the Albanians (though here he means those who live in modern Azerbaijan), those suffering from frenzy and who wander about alone could be seized and bound, sumptuously looked after for a year, and then put to death.

52. Plautus, *The Prisoners* 547ff. See also Pliny, *Natural History* 28.7.

53. Plautus, *Poenulus* 527. See also Aristophanes, *Birds* 524; Sophocles, *Ajax* 255, 725.

54. Phaedrus, *Aesopic Fables* 3.14.1–3; Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica* 3.42; see also Horace, *Art of Poetry* 455–56; Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.4.148; Petronius, *Satyricon* 92.

make too much of such accounts as they are disparate and probably unrepresentative in their nature (see Harrison 1921). But, nonetheless, we should not ignore the evidence that those deemed mad were thought to be of no value in the sight of others, and, along with others in this category (such as the indigent and the elderly), were often assumed to be disposable and could be killed or left to die.⁵⁵ Indeed, it was recommended by some that they should be systematically slaughtered.⁵⁶

Two Cases of Madness: Carabas and Jesus ben Ananias

However, before we return to the historical Jesus, I would like to focus on the two fullest accounts of the treatment of those deemed mad in the ancient world: the account of Carabas in Philo (*Flaccus* 6.36-41) and that of Jesus ben Ananias in Josephus (*J.W.* 6.300-305). Both tell us much about the treatment of the insane in the early empire. Despite their familiarity to some, I think it is important to include the accounts in their entirety.

According to Philo, during the reign of Caligula, the pagan populace of Alexandria, stirred by anti-Semitic feelings at the visit of Agrippa, decided to insult him by dressing up a madman Carabas as a mock king:

Ἦν τις μεμνῶς ὄνομα Καραβᾶς οὐ τὴν ἀγρίαν καὶ θηριώδη μανίαν — ἄσκηπτος γὰρ αὕτη γε καὶ τοῖς ἔχουσι καὶ τοῖς πλησιάζουσιν—, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀνειμένην καὶ μαλακωτέραν. οὗτος διημέρευε καὶ διενυκτέρευε γυμνὸς ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς οὔτε θάλπος οὔτε κρυμὸν ἐκτρεπόμενος, ἄθυρμα (37) νηπίων καὶ μειρακίων σχολαζόντων. συναλῶσαντες τὸν ἄθλιον ἄχρι τοῦ γυμνασίου καὶ στήσαντες μετέωρον, ἵνα καθορῶτο πρὸς πάντων, βύβλον μὲν εὐρύναντες ἀντὶ διαδήματος ἐπιτιθέασιν αὐτοῦ τῇ κεφαλῇ, χαμαιοστρώτωρ δὲ τὸ ἄλλο σῶμα περιβάλλουσιν ἀντὶ χλαμύδος, ἀντὶ δὲ σκῆπτρου βραχύ τι παπύρου τμήμα τῆς ἐγχωρίου καθ' ὁδὸν ἐρριμμένον ἰδῶν (38) τις ἀναδίδωσιν. ἐπεὶ δὲ ὡς ἐν θεατρικοῖς μίμοις τὰ παράσημα τῆς βασιλείας ἀνειλήφει καὶ διεκεκόσμητο εἰς βασιλέα, νεανίαὶ ῥάβδους ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων φέροντες ἀντὶ λογχοφόρων ἐκατέρωθεν εἰστήκεσαν μιμούμενοι δορυφόρους. εἴθ' ἕτεροι προσήεσαν, οἱ μὲν ὡς ἀσπασόμενοι, οἱ δὲ ὡς (39) δικασόμενοι, οἱ δ' ὡς ἐντευξόμενοι περὶ κοινῶν πραγμάτων. εἴτ' ἐκ τοῦ περιεστῶτος ἐν κύκλῳ πλήθους ἐξήχει βοή τις ἄτοπος Μάριν ἀποκαλούντων οὕτως δὲ φασὶ τὸν κύριον ὀνομάζεσθαι παρὰ Σύροις.

55. For the vulnerability of the sick, poor and disabled to neglect and lethal violence, see, for example, Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.10; Valerius Maximus Paterculius, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 6.8; Suetonius, *Claudius* 25. See also Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 12.3.

56. Most famously, for example, Plato, *Republic* 410a.

(36) There was a certain lunatic named Carabas, whose madness was not of the fierce and savage kind, which is dangerous both to the madmen themselves and those who approach them, but of the easy-going, gentler sort. He spent day and night in the streets naked, shunning neither heat nor cold, made game of by children and the lads who were idling about. (37) The rioters drove the poor fellow into the gymnasium and set him up on high to be seen of all and put on his head a sheet of byblus spread out wide for a diadem, clothed the rest of his body with a rug for a royal robe, while someone who had noticed a piece of the native papyrus thrown away in the road gave it to him for his sceptre. (38) And when as in some theatrical farce he had received the insignia of kingship and had been tricked out as a king, young men carrying rods on their shoulders as spearmen stood on either side of him in imitation of a bodyguard. Then others approached him, some pretending to salute him, others to sue for justice, others to consult on state affairs. (39) Then from the multitudes standing round him there rang out a tremendous shout hailing him as 'Marin', which is said to be the name for 'lord' in Syria (Colson LCL).

The similarities between the treatment of Carabas and Jesus of Nazareth are obvious on even a cursory read. Indeed, W.D. Davies and Dale Allison (1997: 599) cite it as the closest parallel that we have in literature of the period to the mocking of Jesus. Some have argued that Philo's account might well have directly affected that of Mark, and others have maintained its direct influence on Matthew's redaction of the event (Matthew adds the detail that Jesus is given a κάλαμος as a mock sceptre [Mt. 27.29] while Carabas is similarly given a piece of πάπυρος to serve the same purpose). John Dominic Crossan (1995: 127) even goes so far as to suggest that Carabas's mocking is in part responsible for the creation of the tradition that Jesus was mocked, saying, 'Suppose, now, that somebody with magnificent imagination took an exegesis such as that in the Epistle of Barnabas 7 and a story such that in *Against Flaccus* 32–39 and put them together...'

However, for all the interest the parallels between the mocking of Carabas and Jesus have generated since Grotius, the fact that Carabas is described as suffering from μανία is rarely considered of any consequence. Indeed, in Paul Winter's otherwise informative discussion of the possible relationship of the Carabas episode to the traditions of the mocking of Jesus, he rather oddly refers to Carabas as a 'lout' (Winter 1974: 100). This is a peculiarly inappropriate way of talking about the character as Philo has presented him. Here we have a madman, of what Philo calls the 'gentle kind', mocked as a king (albeit, if Philo is correct, as a way of mocking someone else—Agrippa or, indeed, the Jews of Alexandria as a whole). Surely it is far from insignificant that the event with the closest

parallels to the mocking of Jesus involves the mocking of a madman.

The story of the Jesus ben Ananias is well known to New Testament scholars. He is often cited as an example of a category of oracular or popular prophet with strong parallels to the historical Jesus both in his message and treatment, and, like Jesus, is a peasant from the countryside, who appeared in Jerusalem only for trouble to ensue.

(300) τὸ δὲ τούτων φοβερώτερον, Ἰησοῦς γάρ τις υἱὸς Ἀνανίου τῶν ἰδιωτῶν ἄγροικος πρὸ τεσσάρων ἐτῶν τοῦ πολέμου τὰ μάλιστα τῆς πόλεως εἰρηνευομένης καὶ εὐθηνούσης, ἐλθὼν εἰς τὴν ἑορτήν, ἐν ἣ σκηνοποιεῖσθαι πάντας ἔθος τῷ θεῷ, κατὰ τὸ ἱερόν (301) ἑξαπίνης ἀναβοᾶν ἤρξατο φωνὴ ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς, φωνὴ ἀπὸ δύσεως, φωνὴ ἀπὸ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων, φωνὴ ἐπὶ Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ τὸν ναόν, φωνὴ ἐπὶ νυμφίους καὶ νύμφας, φωνὴ ἐπὶ τὸν λαὸν πάντα. τοῦτο μεθ' ἡμέραν καὶ νύκτωρ κατὰ πάντας τοὺς στενωπούς (302) περιῆει κεκραγώς. τῶν δὲ ἐπισημῶν τινὲς δημοτῶν ἀγανακτήσαντες πρὸς τὸ κακόφημον συλλαμβάνουσι τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ πολλαῖς αἰκίζονται πληγαῖς. ὁ δὲ οὐθ' ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ φθηγξάμενος οὔτε ἰδίᾳ (303) πρὸς τοὺς παῖοντας, ὡς καὶ πρότερον φωνὰς βοᾶν διετέλει. νομίσαντες δὲ οἱ ἄρχοντες, ὅπερ ἦν, δαιμονιώτερον τὸ κίνημα τάνδρος (304) ἀνάγουσιν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸν παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις ἔπαρχον. ἔνθα μάλιστα μέχρι ὀστέων ξινοῦμενος οὐθ' ἰκέτευσεν οὔτ' ἐδάκρυσεν, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐνῆν μάλιστα τὴν φωνὴν ὀλοφυρτικῶς παρεγκλίνων πρὸς ἐκάστην (305) ἀπεκρίνατο πληγὴν αἰαὶ Ἱεροσολύμοις. τοῦ δ' Ἀλβίνου διερωτῶντος, οὗτος γὰρ ἔπαρχος ἦν, τίς εἶη καὶ πόθεν, καὶ διὰ τί ταῦτα φθέγγοιτο, πρὸς ταῦτα μὲν οὐδ' ὅτιοῦν ἀπεκρίνατο, τὸν δὲ ἐπὶ τῇ πόλει θρῆνον εἴρων οὐ διελείπειν, μέχρι καταγνοῦς μαῖναν ὁ (306) Ἀλβίνος ἀπέλυσεν αὐτόν.

(300) But a further portent was even more alarming. Four years before the war, when the city was enjoying profound peace and prosperity, there came to the feast at which it is the custom of all Jews to erect tabernacles to God (301), one Jesus, son of Ananias, a rude peasant who, standing in the temple, suddenly began to cry out, 'A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds; a voice against Jerusalem and the sanctuary, a voice against the bridegroom and the bride, a voice against all the people'. Day and night he went about (302) all the alleys with this cry on his lips. Some of the leading citizens, incensed at these ill-omened words, arrested the fellow and severely chastised him. (303) But he, without a word on his own behalf or for the private ear of those who smote him, only continued his cries as before. Thereupon, the magistrates, supposing, as was indeed the case, that the man was under some supernatural impulse, brought him before the Roman governor; (304) there, although flayed to the bone with scourges, he neither sued for mercy nor shed a tear, but merely introducing the most mournful of variations into his ejaculation, responded to each stroke with 'Woe to Jerusalem!' (305) When Albinus, the governor, asked him who and whence he was and why

he uttered these cries, he answered him never a word, but unceasingly reiterated his dirge over the city, until (306) Albinus pronounced him a maniac and let him go (Thackeray LCL).

Again, even a superficial reading reveals that the parallels between the treatment of Jesus ben Ananias and Jesus of Nazareth are extremely close. So close that some have felt it necessary to demonstrate that there is no direct literary relationship between Josephus's account and the accounts of the evangelists (Evans 1995: 361). Craig Evans (1995: 360-61) has usefully summarized these striking similarities:

Both entered the precincts of the Temple (Mark 11.11, 15, 27, 12.35, 13.1, 14.49; JW 6.5.3) at the time of a religious festival (Mk 14.2, 15.6, Jn 2.23; JW 6.5.3). Both spoke of the doom of Jerusalem (Lk. 19.41-22, 21.20-24; JW 6.5.3), the Sanctuary (Mk 3.2, 14.58; JW 6.5.3.301), and the people (Mk 13.17; Lk. 19.44; 23.28-31; JW 6.5.3.301). Both apparently alluded to Jeremiah 7, where the prophet condemned the Temple establishment of his day ('cave of robbers': Jer. 7.11 in Mk 11.17; 'the voice against the bridegroom and the bride'; Jer. 7.34 in JW 6.5.3.301). Both were 'arrested' by the authority of the Jewish—not the Roman—leaders (Mk 14.48; Jn 18.12; JW 6.5.3.302). Both were beaten by the Jewish authorities (Mt. 26.68; Mk 14.65; JW 6.5.3.302). Both were handed over to the Roman governor (Lk. 23.1; JW 6.5.3.303). Both were interrogated by the Roman governor (Mk 15.4; JW 6.5.3.305). Both were scourged by the governor (Jn 19.1; JW 6.5.3.304). Governor Pilate may have offered to release Jesus of Nazareth, but did not; Governor Albinus did release Jesus son of Ananias (Mk 15.9; JW 6.5.3.305).

The fact that Jesus ben Ananias was handed over to the Romans by some of the leaders amongst the Jews in Jerusalem has been recognized as a particularly significant detail by many commentators. As Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz remark,

By all accounts the Jerusalem local authority was involved in the trial of Jesus as a kind of first instance, whereas Pilate was responsible for the execution in the last instance. We find an analogy to this series of 'instances' in the proceedings against Jesus son of Ananias, the prophet of disaster, which are reported by Josephus (1998: 460; Müller 1998: 70).

In many such ways the story of Jesus ben Ananias makes that of Jesus of Nazareth, as presented in the Gospels, somewhat more historically plausible.

However, despite all these significant parallels, once again nothing has been made of Jesus ben Ananias being judged insane by Albinus. This is all the stranger when we note that the reasons for Albinus's judgment

surely have resonances for anyone familiar with the story of Jesus of Nazareth. According to Josephus, ben Ananias displayed behaviour typical of the mad when he appeared before the governor: he showed no regard either for his own life (failing to ask for mercy nor complaining ‘despite being flayed to the bone’) or for those around him (he failed to answer Albinus’s questions, merely repeating his oracle, not saying who he was, or where he was from or why he making this pronouncement).⁵⁷

Of course, the obvious difference in their fates might be one of the reasons that the madness of Jesus ben Ananias has been thought of no consequence in understanding the historical Jesus: Jesus ben Ananias was released, not exactly unharmed (it was something of a miracle that he recovered from his wounds) but alive. However, from the perspective of a Roman such as Pilate, the behaviour of Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus ben Ananias differed markedly, and so it is unsurprising that the treatment meted out to them did so too. Jesus’ behaviour in the Temple would have indicated that Jesus was not just mad, but one of those madmen who suffered from the most severe and problematic forms of mania. Jesus did not just declaim against the Temple, as did ben Ananias, but also seems to have been involved in some kind of physical action within it (Mt. 21.12-13; Mk 11.15-19; Lk. 19.45-48; Jn 2.13-17)—something that has often been thought the proximate cause of his demise.⁵⁸ It is not relevant, for our purposes, to speculate about what Jesus himself may have intended by his actions, but it is fair to say that it did involve some force on his part but not, according to all the accounts we possess,⁵⁹ on the part of his followers. From a Roman point of view, Jesus’ actions in the Temple would be most easily understood as the anti-social, erratic ravings of a particular kind of lone madman, the kind that is not released, unfettered (as was the case with ben Ananias) to roam the streets, but who had to be dealt with. Even if Jesus had not displayed such aggression before, which is not necessarily the case, he could easily fall into this category and be judged one of those who despite ‘showing the most complete appearance of sanity whilst seizing occasion for mischief... are detected by the result of their acts’ (Celsus, *De Medicina* 1.183-84). The belief that Jesus was

57. For examples of the insane’s lack of concern for their own lives, see Aretaeus, *Causes and Symptoms of Chronic Diseases* 1.5, 6; Horace, *Art of Poetry* 462-63; Mk 5.5. For their failure to communicate meaningfully with those around them, see Celsus, *De Medicina* 3.18.11; Caelius Aurelianus, *Chronic Diseases* 1.148.

58. See Mk 11.18; see also Mt. 27.40/Mk 15.29; Jn 2.19; Acts 6.14. Sanders 1985: 301-306.

59. Mt. 21.12-13; Mk 11.15-19; Lk. 19.45-48; Jn 2.13-22.

just such a madman was probably already in circulation during his ministry, and it is always possible that this reputation preceded him. The tradition in Mk 3.19b-21 is hardly one that the early church would have invented and, for our purposes, it is important to note that it tells us that his family sought to restrain him, a sign that his mania was considered particularly severe. Indeed, perhaps, as Sanders (1993: 153) speculates, this tradition might be 'a remnant of a once larger body of material that depicted Jesus as engaging in erratic behaviour'. Jesus' age might also have encouraged such a judgment by Pilate. According to Caelius Aurelianus, 'Mania occurs most frequently in young and middle-aged men, rarely in old men, and most infrequently in children and women'.⁶⁰ In addition, Jesus did not show signs of the dissociative euphoria associated with the 'gentler' kind of madness and so he is more likely to have been thought more seriously disturbed.⁶¹

Judging Jesus Mad: Concluding Remarks

I began this article by demonstrating that a conundrum that lies at the heart of our understanding of the fate of the historical Jesus has yet to be satisfactorily solved: why was Jesus of Nazareth put to death by the Roman authorities but his followers left untroubled by them? Following my preceding analysis of perceptions and responses to insanity in first-century culture, we are now in a better place to examine the plausibility of my contention that the conundrum can be resolved by assuming that the Romans thought Jesus of Nazareth to be a deranged and deluded lunatic.

From Pilate's perspective, Jesus would have demonstrated the symptoms of a madman by his behaviour. Not only might his actions in the Temple have indicated this but, from what we can determine, during their audience Jesus behaved in a perplexing and abnormal fashion. The earliest account of Jesus' appearance before the Roman governor presents him as someone who answers Pilate's initial, customary question about his identity in a terse and oblique manner before refusing to make any further response to the accusations made against him, despite being reminded of the importance of the charges (Mk 15.5, see also Mt. 27.12, 14).⁶² Even though the Johannine Jesus is rather more forthcoming, as he so often is, the con-

60. Caelius Aurelianus, *Chronic Diseases* 1.146.

61. '[A] madman's illness is less serious when accompanied by laughter than by gravity', Celsus, *De Medicina* 3.18.20.

62. Of course, the tradition of Jesus' silence may well have developed under the influence of Isa. 53.7 (see, for example, Acts 8.32). See also 1 Pet. 2.22-23.

versation is hardly enlightening from Pilate's perspective and presents another tradition of Jesus as obstinate and abstruse in his communication with the governor. Indeed, in the Gospels Jesus displays a lack of concern for his own fate that typified the mad in literature of the day. As Horace observed, 'The mad have no interest in their fate, they do not wish to be saved...who saves a man against his will does the same as murder him' (*Art of Poetry* 462-63).

The content of claims made by Jesus or about him, whilst probably understandable within a first-century Jewish context to at least some Jews, would have seemed somewhat odd, to say the least, to a Roman official. If, as seems likely, the historical Jesus did proclaim something about the arrival of the kingdom of God⁶³ and believed himself⁶⁴ and the Twelve⁶⁵ to have some part in it, but did not think of himself as somehow establishing this by force of arms, it would be perfectly reasonable for Pilate to assume that he was, in some sense, delusional. The fact that he probably maintained that his Kingdom was already present,⁶⁶ despite the lack of material evidence, would surely have reinforced this diagnosis. From a Roman point of view would Jesus of Nazareth really appear much different from cases of delusion typical of common forms of mania? From people who believed themselves to be Atlas, bearing the world on their shoulders or some other god (Galen 8.190 K)? Or those that thought themselves to be famous actors, orators, animals, or even inanimate objects (Galen 8.190 K)? It is difficult to see how Jesus of Nazareth would appear much different from, say, Thrasyllus, an Athenian who was under the delusion that every ship entering and leaving Piraeus belonged to him (Aelian, *Varia Historia* 4.25); or the inhabitant of Argos who believed himself to be applauding great tragic actors while seated alone in an empty theatre (Horace, *Epistles* 2.2.126); or Menecrates, whose facility at healing led him to think he was Zeus (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 7.33-34); or even the man who thought himself a stalk of grain and asserted that he occupied the centre of the universe (Caelius Aurelianus, *Chronic Diseases* 1.152); or the woman who believed that the fate of the universe hung on whether she were to bend her little finger (Alexander of Tralles, *Twelve Books on Medicine* 1.605, 607).

63. E.g. Mk 10.15, 23; Lk. 6.20/Mt. 5.3; Lk. 11.2/Mt. 6.10; Lk. 13.28/Mt. 8.11; Mt. 12.31; Lk. 14.15.

64. E.g. Mk 1.14; 3.27; 14.25; Lk. 11.20/Mt. 12.28; *Gos. Thom.* 82.

65. E.g. Mk 3.14; 6.7; Lk. 22.30/Mt. 19.28; Mt. 20.21; Lk. 8.1; 18.31.

66. E.g. Lk. 10.23/Mt. 13.16; Lk. 16.16/Mt. 11.12; Lk. 10.18; 17.21; *Gos. Thom.* 51.

The likelihood that Jesus was perceived to be insane is also indicated in the details of his execution. Although the mocking of Jesus as a king might well have come naturally to the auxiliaries if they knew about the specific kingly claims made by or about Jesus,⁶⁷ we should not overlook the possibility that their preoccupation with Jesus' kingship might come directly from the fact that kingship was often closely associated with the insane—that association could be reason enough to explain the form that the mockery took. We have already noted that the closest parallels to the mocking of Jesus (Mt. 27.27-3; Mk 15.16-20; and also Jn 19.1-3)⁶⁸ are found in the treatment of the madman Carabas, who was, of course, arrayed as a king.⁶⁹ Most 'temporary kings' in antiquity, such as the unfortunate Carabas or those given this role in the Saturnalia, were insane or expected to act the part of the madman, turning the world upside down,⁷⁰ and the mad were particularly associated with crowns in the first century. The medical writer Aretaeus, for example, refers to the behaviour of the mad who 'go openly to the market crowned, as if victors in some contest of skill' (*Causes and Symptoms of Chronic Diseases* 1.6). Although a polysemous symbol, the crown in the first-century world could carry something of the symbolic resonances of the dunce's hat in Victorian England, and was part of the cultural construction of insanity. Indeed, the crucifixion between two 'brigands', who may well have functioned as a macabre royal retinue reminiscent of the mock guards on either side of Carabas during his pretend enthronement,⁷¹ and the *titulus* itself might not be intended to tell onlookers of Jesus' crime of sedition but rather to function as a comic graffito, a shorthand way of conveying the idea that the man on the cross was self-evidently delusional.⁷² Other aspects of his treatment, such as his

67. For a recent analysis of penal mockery and its unintended theological consequences, see Marcus 2006.

68. And which probably lies behind the account of the mocking by Herod's soldiers in Lk. 23.11.

69. For other parallels, see the accounts of the mockery of a prisoner by pirates (Plutarch, *Pompey* 24.7-8); the game Basilinda (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.114; Pollux, *Onomasticon* 9.110); theatrical mimes (P. Oxy. frag. 413); carnival festivals such as the Sacaean feast (Strabo, *Geography* 11.8.4-5; Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 4.66-70); the Saturnalia (Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis* 8.2); and the Kronia (Porphyry, *Abstinence* 2.54, 56). Brown 1994: 874-77.

70. See Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis* 8.2.

71. Philo, *Flaccus* 38. See Marcus 2006: 74.

72. *Tituli* could be somewhat sarcastic. For evidence of their use, see also Suetonius, *Caligula* 32.2; *Domitian* 10.1; Tertullian, *Apology* 2.20; Dio Cassius, *History* 54.3.7; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.1.44; and Brown 1994: 963. Placards more

being spat upon (Mt. 27.30; Mk 15.19), whilst not something only meted out to the mad, was, as we have seen, a characteristic of their experience. Similarly, scourging (Mt. 27.26; Mk 15.15), while often part of the penalty of crucifixion,⁷³ was also something particularly associated with the insane, as we have seen in the case of ben Ananias and elsewhere.⁷⁴ The wine that Jesus is given on the cross was thought of as a cure for madness, a way of bringing one to one's senses (Lk. 23.36; Jn 19.29)—possibly a final humiliation (Celsus, *De Medicina* 3.19.4).

Of course, objections could be raised to the case that has been made. It might be argued, for example, that from our sources it seems that Jesus of Nazareth behaved in a manner that would appear rational to those about him and distinguish him from Carabas and Jesus ben Ananias. In our accounts, he does not display the kind of abnormal behaviour that, to a modern reader, would mark these two individuals out as suffering from some kind of severe mental impairment. However, it is important to emphasize that insanity was thought to include a spectrum of behaviours, and some considered quite mad were more than capable of rational action most of the time (as, for example, we can see in the case of Theonastus, who caused Cicero such problems; Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.4.148). Indeed, it is important to recall that it was those capable of showing the 'most complete appearance of sanity' that Celsus believed should be dealt with most severely (*De Medicina* 3.18.3-4) and that Jesus' action in the Temple might well indicate to some that he had the capacity for dangerous outbursts that characterized the dangerously insane.

It could also be objected that none of the later critics of Christianity believed Jesus of Nazareth to be insane and instead later polemics seem to focus upon the accusation that Jesus was a magician or charlatan of some kind.⁷⁵ However, later polemics do not tell us much of value about

generally could be employed to convey a range of different information to crowds. See Suetonius, *Claudius* 21; Cassius Dio, *History* 60.13.5; 69.16; Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 5.14; the Médaillon de Cavillargues, which is in the Musée Archéologique (Nîmes). See Aldrete 1999: 79, 122, 124.

73. Livy, *Histories* 33.36, 3; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.306; 5.446-51; Philo, *Flaccus* 72, 84.

74. Although, of course, an important point: in one sense Jesus ben Ananias was not, according to Josephus, mad at all. His predictions were quite right. For flogging of the insane as a regular treatment, intended to bring them to their senses, see Caelius Aurelianus, *Chronic Diseases* 1.175, 179.

75. See, for example, Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 69; Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.28, 68. His reputation as such became so great that within a few decades of his death his name is found being used on magical inscriptions and his crucified form depicted on amulets. See Eitrem 1966: 14 and Smith 1978: 161. For the accusation

the historical Jesus or the events surrounding his death and seem to reflect the kerygma of the church, which gave a prominent place to his miraculous activity.⁷⁶ Indeed, despite its subsequent popularity, the accusation that Jesus was a magician is relatively late and not directly present in the earliest records at all.⁷⁷ The tradition that Jesus was believed to be mad in Mk 3.19b-21 has as great a claim, if not greater, to antiquity. In addition, the allegation that Jesus was mad or, at the very least, extremely stupid is not actually absent from anti-Christian polemics of later years.⁷⁸

Finally, it may be objected that, although I have made a case for the possibility that Jesus was perceived by the Romans to be a madman, we are no closer to knowing why he was put to death. It is customary to assume that a significant event must have a significant cause (Leman 2003), but the death of Jesus was only significant in retrospect, and it might well not have been the consequence of anything much (the Temple incident might well be enough, or Jesus' insolence during the audience with Pilate). Jesus' execution was hardly worth a second thought by Pilate, and in all likelihood, given what we know of Pilate's reputation and the value placed on the insane in antiquity,⁷⁹ probably not even that. As I said at the outset of this piece, we may never know why Jesus died, but we can say that, if he were thought a dangerous, deluded madman, his death is all the more unsurprising.

To solve the conundrum with which we started, we needed to discover a historical Jesus who was not just 'crucifiable', as Dunn (2003: 784) maintains, but one who alone was 'crucifiable', something that is actually much harder to explain than has hitherto been recognized. Given their failure to pursue his followers, it will not do to argue that Jesus was put to death by the Romans because they took the kingly claims made by or about him seriously in any way at all. We may not be able to say why Jesus was killed, but we can rule this explanation out. However, if Jesus of Nazareth was believed by Pilate and his troops to be a worthless, dangerous and disruptive madman, as I have maintained here, we would have found a Jesus that would fit the bill—only he, and not his followers,

that Jesus was a false teacher, see Lucian, *Peregrinus* 13.

76. E.g. Acts 10.38. See Remus 1983 and Meggitt 2006.

77. It can only be inferred from complaints by opponents of Jesus that he carried out his exorcisms by the power of Beelzebul, rather than God (Mt. 9.32-34; Mk 3.22-27; Lk. 11.14-16).

78. See, for example, 1 Cor. 1.18, 23 and (probably) the Alexamenos graffito (Snyder 1985: 27-28).

79. See above, n. 5.

would have been killed. If this Jesus is not one that resembles the historical Jesus' own self-understanding, or the Jesus proclaimed by his followers, that is to be expected and supports rather than undermines the plausibility of this thesis. For ultimately power and madness are inextricably linked, and the gulf between the visions of the world held by those labelled mad, and who suffer the consequences, and those who successfully label others mad, is unbridgeable. Although the historical Jesus probably would not have called for his enemies' damnation,⁸⁰ as with Nathaniel Lee, so with Jesus of Nazareth: 'They called me mad, and I called them mad, and damn them, they out voted me'.

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80. See Lk. 6.27-28/ Mt. 5.44; Klassen 1999.

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