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Leaders of Mass Movements and the Leader of the Jesus Movement

This chapter is an inquiry into the leadership of peasant mass movements and the evidence concerning the social level of Jesus and other leaders in the ancient Mediterranean world. It seeks to answer two questions: (1) Is there a pattern for social origins for such leaders? (2) Does Jesus fit the pattern? Following the answers to these questions, I seek (more speculatively) to answer a third question: what was there about Jesus's background that could have facilitated his leadership? In other words, why would such large groups of people have considered a person from Jesus's socioeconomic class (that is, an artisan) a candidate for leadership?

First, I will define some terms and sketch the social structure of Herodian Palestine. This will provide the background for this investigation. Next, I will survey anthropological studies of peasant mass movements. This survey will help us place the ancient movements in a broader social context. We will find that the same pattern that existed in the ancient movements exists generally in peasant or agrarian societies. Next, I will examine cases of actual mass movements in antiquity, both in the Mediterranean world in general and specifically in Palestine. The results will show that the leaders rarely come from the peasants themselves. Finally, I will inquire whether Jesus and his movement fit the emerging pattern. My conclusion will be that they do.

Definitions

Before we proceed to the investigation, it will be helpful first to define our terms. By *mass movement* I intend to differentiate from one or two spontaneous outbursts of protest or violence. Rather, this phenomenon is a movement involving events over a more extended period of time. On the one hand, a mass movement lasts longer and is more integrated than a mob. On the other hand, it is not as well organized as a political party. Further, by the word *mass* I intend to differentiate this group from more than, say, one village. Rather, a large group involving people from outside one's extended family or village is involved. Mass movements according to my meaning may be peaceful or military, secular or religious (though in agrarian societies, certainly ancient ones, most movements of this sort were religious in some sense). Finally, these movements are by definition peasant movements since the overwhelming majority of the ancient population was made up of the rural peasantry (see below).[1]

Second, before we look at the evidence for a pattern of leadership among peasant mass movements, it will be helpful to sketch the social stratification of Herodian Palestine. A number of New Testament scholars have used as a heuristic model G. Lenski's theory of social stratification.[2] This theory analyzes societies according to economic-technological systems. His chapter on agrarian societies indicates that essentially two classes existed: upper and lower. In the upper class were the landed nobility, which for Palestine would include the rulers (king, procurator, tetrarch), the high priest, and other wealthy lay aristocrats, and the families of each of these. The upper class consisted in ancient agrarian societies of only about 1 to 2 percent of the total population according to historians.[3] We should probably expect that the upper class in Herodian Palestine was roughly the same, for it required a large percentage of agricultural work-

1. I have adapted this definition from Heberle, "Social Movements."

2. Lenski, *Power and Privilege,* 189–296. This theory is presented again in a later publication with slight modifications. See Lenski and Lenski, *Human Societies,* 166–213. For New Testament scholars who have used Lenski's model, see Fiensy, *Social History,* 155–76; Fiensy, "Jesus' Socio-Economic Background," 225–55; Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees;* Duling and Perrin, *New Testament,* 49–56; Rohrbaugh, "Social Location of the Markan Audience"; Crossan, *Historical Jesus,* 43–46; Arlandson, *Women, Class, and Society,* 14–119.

3. See Alföldy, *Römische Sozialgeschichte*, 130; MacMullen *Roman Social Relations*, 89; Rilinger, "Moderne und zeitgenössische Vortellungen," 302; Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 219.

ers to enable landlords to live in relative luxury, and, as Lenski shows, in agrarian societies wealth in the main was derived from land.

The second part of agrarian societies—that is the remaining 98 percent—consisted of the peasantry, artisans, merchants, and the criminal and beggar elements. Lenski offers a table that illustrates his understanding of agrarian societies.[4] The table looks rather like an upside-down toy top. The very narrow part of the top, which projects above the rest, represents the upper class. The fat part of the top represents the majority of the population: the rural peasants, and the village and urban craftsmen and merchants. A peasant was a subsistence farmer, who not only provided his own maintenance, usually by working in family units, but also, with what little surplus he produced, supported the elite class to whom he was in some way in subjection.[5] His support of the elite class came in the form of taxes or rents (or both) on the use of land. The peasants were by far the largest group, since ancient agrarian technology required about ten people in the country to produce enough food to enable one person to live away from the land.[6]

The smaller group in the fat part of the top was the group of merchants, craftsmen, and day laborers that lived in the urban centers or villages. The craftsmen or artisans composed 3 to 7 percent of the total population in agrarian societies.[7]

Toward the bottom of the upside-down top were the classes of people degraded because of illegitimate birth, occupation, or disease. At the very bottom were the so-called expendable peoples: the criminals and beggars. Lenski estimates that in most agrarian societies between 5 and 10 percent of the population belonged in this last group.[8]

4. Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 284. See also his slightly altered version in *Human Societies*, 211. This table has been adapted and reproduced in numerous publications. See Fiensy, *Social History*, 158; Rohrbaugh, "Social Location," 383; Duling and Perrin, *New Testament*, 56.

5. For a more complete definition of peasant see Fiensy, *Social History*, vi–vii. See also Scott, *Moral Economy,* 157; Wolf, *Peasants,* 2–3; Foster, "What Is a Peasant?"; Powell, "On Defining Peasants and Peasant Society," 94–99.

6. See White, "Expansion of Technology," 1:143–74; de Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle,* 10. Cf. Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 279, who says that the urban populations were 5 to 10 percent of the total. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 253, maintains, however, that 70 to 75 percent of the population in ancient Italy was peasant.

7. Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 279.

8. Ibid., 281–83.

Thus in ancient agrarian societies approximately 90 percent of the population lived outside the city. Around 10 percent lived in cities and larger towns, including a very small percentage (1 to 2 percent) of elites, a merchant group, an artisan group (between 3 and 7 percent), and an urban day-laborer segment.

Many historians and sociologists have concluded that in addition to featuring social stratification, agrarian society was bifurcated into urban and rural populations.[9] The rural population in the eastern Roman Empire for the most part seems to have maintained their native languages and customs. On the other hand, in the cities more people spoke Greek, many were literate, and most were in touch to some degree with the great institutions and ideas of Greco-Roman society (see further below).

Leadership Patterns

Social-Science Studies of Peasantry

Studies in peasant mass movements have concentrated mainly on rebellions.[10] This emphasis may not seem at first relevant for understanding the ministry of Jesus. But one should bear in mind two considerations. First, these studies describe how leaders emerged to articulate the problems and to attempt to implement solutions for the masses. Since, as I will argue below, Jesus also led a mass movement, these leaders offer useful comparisons. Further, one must always bear in mind that religion, economics, and politics were not compartmentalized in antiquity. The mass movements surveyed below were not just political but religious as well. Sometimes the religious nature of these movements is accentuated, but even when that is not the case, one should suspect that the peasants believed that God was on their side. Whether using violent or peaceful means, most peasant mass movements have pursued goals that combine religion, economics, and politics. Thus, these other movements were not so different from the Jesus movement in form.

9. Ibid., 272–73; Alföldy, *Die römische Gesellschaft*, 10; de Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 10, 13; Rostovtzeff, *Roman Empire,* 193, 346; MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 46.

10. Some sociologists distinguish between rebellions (unsuccessful movements) and revolutions (which change the structure of society). Others seem to use the terms interchangeably. In this chapter, except when I quote others, the distinction will be maintained.

"By themselves the peasants have never been able to accomplish a revolution," maintained B. Moore.[11] Sociologists have observed that when peasant protest turns to rebellion, usually the movement is led by someone outside the peasantry, and that rebellions can almost never succeed in becoming successful revolutions without such leadership.[12] Who would be peasant leaders in periods of protest and rebellion? Such leaders could come from discontented intellectuals, from dissident landed aristocracy, from priests and other religious leaders, from artisans, from teachers and from village leaders.

Prior to the appearance of such leadership, peasants are not usually standing around waiting for a revolution. According to J. Migdal,[13] they may know of specific deficiencies in their relationships with the elites and want to alleviate them, but they have no vision of changing an entire system. Peasants are extremely reluctant to rebel since they always fear that their subsistence might be threatened. Further, any dissatisfaction they might have is with the particulars of their situations, not with the system as a whole. Indeed they seem to have little vision of any other possibilities. Thus peasants do not want to restructure society but simply to make their individual lives more tolerable.[14]

Therefore peasants seldom have exactly the same purpose or goals for rebellion that the leaders have. As J. C. Scott observes, "the masses are not ideologically sound."[15] Yet while they may have a different—or somewhat different—vision for the future than their leaders, they nonetheless look to them to make it all happen.

The leaders from outside the peasantry offer two services to their followers. They articulate grievances and organize for action, which has consequences beyond the peasants' immediate problems. Without outside leadership peasant goals in rebellion remain very limited. They may seize some of the landlord's grain, lead their flocks onto the landlord's meadows, or kill a tax collector. They want subsistence and lower taxes.

11. Moore, S*ocial Origins,* 479.

12. Sabean, "Markets, Uprisings"; Scott, *Moral Economy*, 173; Scott, "Revolution in the Revolution"; Mousnier, *Peasant Uprisings,* 219, 323, 327; Wunder, "Mentality," 157; Migdal, *Peasants,* 231; Chesneaux, *Peasant Revolts in China,* 6; Wolf, *Peasant Wars,* 8.

13. Migdal, *Peasants*, 248.

14. Moore, *Social Origins*, 457.

15. Scott, "Revolution in the Revolution," 97, 99.

Anything more usually requires leadership from the literate, from those of the Great Tradition (i.e., the literary, urban tradition).[16]

For example, during the German Peasants' War of 1525 one of the leaders of the uprising in the Samland was a miller.[17] Likewise the leader of the peasant movement in Russia in 1670 was a member of the upper class of old Cossacks.[18] The same can be said for rebellions in non-European peasant societies. The leader of a rebellion of miners in the Andes was a schoolteacher. Likewise the leader of the insurrection of Mexican hacienda peasants in the early part of the twentieth century was a village curate.[19]

Mainland China has experienced numerous peasant rebellions. A revolt in the seventeenth century was led by five persons, two of whom were soldiers and one of whom was from the elite class. The social origins of the other two are unknown.[20] Likewise, revolts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were led by ruined artisans, intellectuals, and monks, and even discontented members of the ruling class.[21]

Further, peasant rebellions often have taken a religious or millenarian meaning. Thus the German Peasants' War was cast by the miller referred to above as the "Christian men" versus the 'godless nobles'. By interpreting their plight in terms of the Christian gospel, the miller gave divine legitimacy to their concerns and so helped unite them for action. The leader of the peasants in Russia referred to above claimed for the Russian rebellion the protection of the Virgin Mary, whose will they were accomplishing. Thus the Russian rebellion conformed to God's will and was destined to restore his rightful order whereas the opponents of the peasants were on the side of Satan and his angels. Many anthropologists have noted the prevalence of millenarian ideas in these rebellions even in movements in China. Many rebels in China looked back with religious

16. The terms "Great Tradition" and "Little Tradition" were coined by Redfield. He described peasant culture as a half culture. One half is the Great Tradition, the tradition of the reflective few cultivated in schools and temples, the tradition of the philosopher, theologian, or literary man. The other half, the Little Tradition, is the low culture, folk culture or popular tradition, which is passed on among the unlettered of the village community. See Redfield, *Peasant Society,* 68–84. Cf. Foster, "What Is a Peasant?," 2–14.

17. Wunder, "Mentality," 157.

18. Mousnier, *Peasant Uprisings,* 216–27.

19. Handelman, *Struggle in the Andes,* 68; Wolf, *Peasant Wars*, 8.

20. Parsons, *Peasant Rebellions,* 6.

21. Chesneaux, *Peasant Revolts*, 16.

feeling and nostalgia to a time of primitive justice, and appealed to God for a return. Thus heaven would restore justice in a new age of peace, and light would prevail over darkness.[22] Thus, for many peasant leaders, articulating the peasants' cause has meant casting the needs and goals of the masses in religious terms.

Peasants may acquire leaders in one of two ways. An opportunist or an idealist may seize the day when he sees the situation calls for a leader. Or the peasants themselves may recruit leadership. When the latter occurs, peasants usually seek the services of a trusted official. They desire that one who has served them well in the past now perform this function.

D. Sabean[23] maintains that peasants often turn to the town market centers and to the leaders within those centers. The village artisans, priests, and officials are the brokers who mediate between peasants and the elite. These people have already established a network of both peasants and rulers. They have grown used to playing the intermediate role between the two. Thus, Sabean terms them "brokers." They can move comfortably in either world. Usually these brokers, who serve as rebel leaders, say they have been pressured by the peasantry to do so. They struggle with the tensions between loyalty to the elite and service to the peasants, and in the end choose the latter because only in that way can they remain brokers. For example, in the German Peasants' War, the mayor of a market town became a rebel leader when the peasants voted for war. He later claimed that he did not want war but went along with it when so many of the poor people voted for it, and thus he became their leader.[24] The brokers, then, often retain their structural function even in mass movements.

Thus, peasant studies of both Western and Eastern societies, both medieval and contemporary, indicate the peasant need for leadership outside the peasantry. Peasants need someone in touch with the Great Tradition, someone from the city with contacts with the elite. These potential leaders of peasant movements Sabean terms "brokers." Second, many (probably all) peasant rebellions have taken on a religious or even millenarian meaning for the peasants.

22. For the German peasants' rebellion, see Wunder, "Mentality," 157; for the Russian rebellion, see Mousnier, *Peasant Uprisings*, 216–27; for millenarianism in general, see Scott, "Revolution in the Revolution," 101–3, and Moore, *Social Origins*, 455; for China, see Chesnaux, *Peasant Revolts*, 16 and Naquin, *Millennarian Rebellion.*

23. Sabean, "Markets, Uprisings," 17–19.

24. Ibid.

The Mass Movements in the Roman Empire

A pattern similar to that of the medieval and contemporary peasant societies surveyed above is evident also in the Roman Empire. We will look at the leadership in native uprisings throughout the Roman Empire and then at the leaders of Palestine. S. Dyson[25] has argued persuasively that the following are mass movements of the native peasantry and not merely reflections of Roman politics. First, the large numbers that followed these leaders indicate generic discontent. Second, the demands for land and the complaints over taxes indicate rebellion over economic causes. The following table is largely dependent on Dyson's article:[26]

Table 2.1: Leaders of the Mass Movements in the Roman Empire (Excluding Palestine)

Leader	Social Origin
Hampsicordia and Hostus (Sardinia, 217 BCE; Livy 23.20.1–41.7)	Aristocrats
Viriathus (Spain, 150 BCE; Appian, *Iberike* 61–75; Diod. 33.1.1–5)	Shepherd
Mariccus (Gaul, 68 CE; Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.61)	Commoner?
Florus and Sacrovir (Gaul, 21 CE; Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.40–66)	Aristocrats
Vindex (Gaul, 68 CE; Dio Cassius 63.22–24)	Aristocrat
Tacfarinas (Africa, 24 CE; Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.52)	Soldier
Aedmon (Africa, 40 CE; Pliny, *HN* 5.1.11)	Freedman of King Ptolemy
Isidorus (Egypt, 172 CE; Dio Cassius 72.12)	Priest
Jonathon (Cyrene, 70 CE; Josephus, *War* 7.438)	Weaver
Boudicca (Britain, 61 CE; Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.31–37; Dio Cassius 62.2–12)	Aristocrat
Vologaesus (Thrace, 11 BCE; Dio Cassius 54.34)	Priest of Dionysus
Aristonicus (Asia Minor, 133 BCE; Strabo 14.1.38)	Illegitimate son of Royalty
Eunus (Sicily, 135 BCE; Diod. 34/35.2.5–26)	Slave
Spartacus (Italy, 73 BCE; Appian, *Civil War* 1.116–120)	Slave, former soldier

25. Dyson, "Native Revolt Patterns," 159 and 171.

26. But see also Cary, *History of Rome,* 221, 282, 36; Grant, *Social History,* 102–4; Lewis, *Life in Egypt,* 205; Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 167.

The table indicates that practically all of these leaders, with the exceptions of Viriathus and Mariccus, came from a class other than the peasantry. Eunus, the slave originally from Syria, may have been a person also of high station before his enslavement. His leadership abilities were legendary. Most of the leaders were aristocrats from noble families. One was a deserter from the Roman army; one was a freedman of Ptolemy (we presume with considerable skill at management); two were priests; and one was a slave who had been a soldier. It is of great interest that one, Jonathon the weaver, was an artisan.

The survey of rebellions in the Roman Empire, then, is consistent with the findings of modern investigations of peasant societies. Leaders rarely came from peasants themselves. Furthermore, at least three of the leaders, Eunus, Sacrovir and Vologaesus (probably also Isidorus), sought to give their movements religious legitimacy, which, as we noted above, is often the case in peasant mass movements.

Mass Movements in Palestine

Next we survey the leaders of mass movements in Palestine. Unfortunately, more information is available from Josephus concerning the military leaders than about the prophetic leaders.[27]

Table 2.2: Leaders of Mass Movements in Palestine

Leader	Social Origin
EARLY UPRISINGS:	
Mattathias and Sons (167 BCE; 1 Macc 2.1)	Priest
Judas, son of Ezekias (4 BCE; Josephus, *Ant.* 17.271–72)	Son of a bandit
Simon (4 BCE; Josephus, *Ant.* 17.273–76)	Slave
Athronges (4 BCE; Josephus, *Ant.* 17.278–85)	Shepherd
Judas of Galilee (6 CE; Josephus, *War* 2.433)	Teacher
THE JEWISH WAR:	
Ananus (66 CE; Josephus, *War* 2.563)	Priest
Joseph ben Gorion (66 CE; Josephus, *War* 2.563)	Aristocrat?

27. In general, for comments on these leaders of mass movements, see Hengel, *Die Zeloten*; Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits*; Rhoads, *Israel in Revolution*; Barnett, "Jewish Sign Prophets."

Leader	Social Origin
Josephus (66 CE; Josephus, *Life* 1–2)	Aristocrat
Simon ben Gamaliel (66 CE; Josephus, *Life* 191)	Aristocrat
Justus of Tiberius (66 CE; Josephus, *Life* 40)	Aristocrat
John of Gischala (66 CE; Josephus, *Life* 74–76)	Merchant Class?
Simon bar Giora (66 CE; Josephus, *War* 4.504)	?
Eleazar ben Ananias (66 CE; Josephus, *War* 2.409)	Priest, Captain of the temple
Menahem (66 CE; Josephus, *War* 2.445)	Teacher
Eleazar ben Simon (66 CE; Josephus, *War* 4.225)	Priest
PROPHETIC MOVEMENTS:	
The Samaritan (37 CE; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.85–87)	?
Theudas (44 CE; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.97–98)	?
The Egyptian (55 CE; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.169–72)	?
John the Baptist (27 CE; Luke 1.5)	Priest

With the exception of those uprisings at the death of Herod the Great, most, if not all, of the groups were led by aristocrats, priests, or teachers. Simon bar Giora's origins are unknown, as are the origins of three of the prophetic leaders: the Samaritan, Theudas, and the Egyptian. It is interesting, however, that the prophet Jesus, son of Ananias, is expressly said to have been from the peasantry, but that no one followed him, and, for that matter, no one was invited to follow him (Josephus, *War* 6.300–309). He was no leader of a mass movement. Palestinian folk, then, from the meager evidence available, follow the same pattern as persons elsewhere in the empire, and follow the same pattern observable in more recent peasant societies.

Those leaders expressly said to have given religious interpretation to their movements were Judas of Galilee, the four prophetic leaders, and probably also Menahem, who made messianic—or at least royal—claims. It is not clear whether Simon bar Giora made similar claims. Yet, given the fact that many peasants see their rebellion in religious terms, as noted above, and that in first-century Palestine religion, politics, and economics were inseparably intertwined,[28] it is likely that virtually all the mass movements surveyed above were viewed as religious movements by the peasants, and thus that all of the leaders of those movements were viewed as religious leaders.

28. See Damaschke, *Bibel und Bodenreform*, 4; Redfield, *Peasant Society*, 27–28; Kautsky, *Politics of Aristocratic Empires,* 273; Wolf, *Peasants*, 277.

The answer to my first question, therefore, is that there is a pattern regarding the social origins of leaders of peasant mass movements. The pattern is that the leaders seldom come from the peasantry itself. Rather, they are discontented aristocrats, soldiers, artisans, priests, or teachers. This was the pattern for peasant societies generally, for the Greco-Roman world in antiquity, and for Palestine in the Second Temple period.

Jesus's Movement

I now ask if Jesus and his movement fit this emerging pattern. We should first of all consider it probable that large crowds followed Jesus—in other words, that Jesus had a mass movement. Both Tacitus and Josephus support the conclusion that large crowds followed Jesus. Tacitus writes:

> Auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat; repressaque in praesens exitiabilis superstitio rursum erumpebat, non modo per Iudaeam, originem eius mali, sed per urbem etiam . . .[29] (*Ann.* 15.44).
>
> The originator of this name [Christian] was Christ who was executed by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius. This pernicious superstition was repressed for a while but broke out again not only in Judea, the origin of the evil, but also throughout the city . . . (my translation)

Tacitus's statement that the superstition was "repressed" for a while only to "break out" later would seem to indicate that he thought of Jesus's following as a mass movement.[30]

The statement of Josephus is even clearer. In the (interpolated) passage about Jesus's ministry and death Josephus writes:

> Και πολλους μεν Ιουδαιους, πολλους δε και του Ελληνικου επηγαγετο[31] (*Ant.* 18.63).
>
> And he gained many Jews and Greeks as followers . . .

29. Text in Pitmann, *Cornelii Taciti*.

30. Cf. Crossan, *Essential Jesus*, vii.

31. Text in Feldman, *Josephus*, 9:50; cf. the reconstructions of Eisler (given in Feldman, *Josephus*, 9:48); Bruce, *New Testament Documents*, 110; Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 46; and Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 55–56. All of these reconstructed versions of Josephus's interpolated text contain the words quoted above. Cf. also the Arabic text of Josephus published in Pines, *Arabic Version*, 16.

Further, Josephus's description of the ministry of John the Baptist indicates that John also had a large following. Antipas actually feared that John's followers might turn to insurrection (στασις) and believed that the crowds following John might do whatever John wanted them to do (*Ant.* 18.118). Thus on analogy with John's ministry we should expect that Jesus also had a large following.[32]

All four Gospels also attest that Jesus had a large following (Matt 4:25; Mark 5:21; 6:34; 7:17; 9:15; 10:46; 11:32; 12:12; Luke 6:17; 9:37; 12:1; John 7:31; 8:2; 12:9). Whether these are all redactional or not, at least it shows that the Four Evangelists had the impression that Jesus led a mass movement. Further, some of the gospel stories assume that Jesus had a large following. The feeding of the five thousand, for example, found in all four Gospels (Matt. 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–15), clearly makes no sense apart from the numbers of people present. Other scenes, especially in Mark, assume a large crowd: e.g., the story in which the roof of Peter's house is removed to lower the afflicted man to Jesus (Mark 2:1–12) and the account of Jesus's teaching from a boat because of the press of the crowd (Mark 4:1).

Finally, we must ask if Jesus would have been crucified had he not led a mass movement. Crucifixion, reserved for the worst criminals and for insurrectionists, would hardly have been the end for one teaching and leading a few score of people.[33] Therefore, I conclude that Jesus led a mass movement and that his name should be added to those leaders listed above.

Second, we should consider it probable that Jesus was an artisan, a τεκτων. Although that assertion is only found in Mark 6:22, and although in the parallel passage in Matt 13:55, he is called "the son of the carpenter," this probability remains high. All the major Greek manuscripts—except one (P^{45})—and many of the early versions have the reading, "Is not this the carpenter?"[34]

Further, these words are found in a text describing Jesus's rejection at his hometown, a narrative very unlikely to have been invented by the early church. Nor is it likely that Mark would ascribe unhistorically the occupation of carpenter to Jesus especially if his gospel was written in Rome.[35] This is because the artisan occupations were not respected by

32. See Brown, *John*, 1:249–50.

33. See Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 46–50.

34. See Cranfield, *Mark*, 194–95; and Metzger, *Textual Commentary,* 88–89.

35. Many scholars agree that the tradition is correct that affirms that Mark was

the Greco-Roman upper classes (see below). Why would Mark want to invent that Jesus had been a carpenter?

The passage in Matthew ("Is not this the son of the carpenter?"), even if one were to argue that it is more accurate or authentic, actually supports the meaning of Mark since fathers usually taught their craft to their sons.[36] Therefore, if Joseph was a carpenter, then Jesus almost certainly was as well.

Finally, we have the apocryphal and patristic texts that affirm or assume that Joseph or Jesus was a carpenter. The most important patristic text is that of Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 88), who maintained that Jesus was a carpenter who made yokes and plows. The apocryphal texts include: the *Protevangelium of James*, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, and the *Arabic Infancy Gospel*. Several of the apocryphal texts are quite late[37] and even rely on the earlier ones. These texts seem to be an amalgam of both written and oral sources. Nevertheless, they at least testify that the church generally thought that Jesus had been an artisan.[38]

But are there any indications from the Gospels that Jesus was not one of the peasantry? G. W. Buchanan has argued[39] that Jesus is found among well-to-do people rather often. He called to be his disciples James and John, sons of Zebedee, a fishing merchant who was wealthy enough to employ day laborers (Mark 1:19–20). Levi the tax collector hosted a banquet for Jesus-in which they were said to recline at the table—and became a disciple (Matt: 9.9–11). A certain man, "of the rulers of the Pharisees," invited Jesus to dine with him (Luke 14:1–6). Jairus, ruler of the synagogue at Capernaum, and a certain unnamed Roman centurion approached him (Mark 5:22–23; Matt 8:5). Zaccheus, the chief tax col-

written in Rome (1 Pet. 5:13; Papias in Eusebius, *H.E.* 2.15; Clement of Alexandria in Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.14). See, e.g., Price, *Interpreting the New Testament*, 195; V. Taylor, *Mark*, 32.

36. See Burford, *Craftsmen,* 83; Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth,* 177–78. For studies on Jesus as carpenter, see: McCown, "O TEKTΩN"; Furfey, "Christ as *τεκτων,*" 324–35; Fiensy, "Jesus' Socioeconomic Background."

37. For the dates, see Hennecke et al., *New Testament Apocrypha*; Vielhauer, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur*; and Quasten, *Patrology*. The earlier texts are the *Prot. Jas.*, the *Inf. Gos. Thom.*, and the *Acts Thom.*, which date from the second to early third century.

38. The exception was Origen, who—in response to Celsus—tried to deny that Jesus had been a carpenter (*Cels.* 6.36).

39. Buchanan, "Jesus and the Upper Class," 195–209.

lector, also gave a meal for Jesus (Luke 19:1–10). Lazarus (or Simon the leper) hosted a banquet for Jesus in Bethany (Mark 14:3; John 12:2). Joanna, the wife of a court official of Antipas, was a disciple of Jesus (Luke 8:3). Nicodemus, said to be a member of the Sanhedrin, was a disciple of Jesus in secret (John 3:1–2; 7:50; 19:39). Finally, Joseph of Arimathea, who buried Jesus's body and was a disciple, is described as a member of the council and wealthy (Matt 27:57; Mark 15:43). These texts are spread throughout the canonical gospels and at least indicate that the Evangelists remembered Jesus as associating with the well-to-do.

That Jesus could so easily move among these wealthier people suggests some experience in similar situations and an earlier association with people of some economic means. Further, given the common urban snobbery toward the village peasants, one may reasonably wonder if a simple village carpenter would ever be the guest of such people as those listed above. It does not follow from these texts, however (*pace* Buchanan), that Jesus was therefore himself wealthy or a member of the elite class. He was only in a position to have known such people. An itinerant artisan who had experience in urban environments, working for wealthy patrons, could easily have become familiar with such people.

D. E. Oakman also argues persuasively for Jesus's itineracy and broad social contacts before his ministry.[40] Oakman notes several foci of social contacts during Jesus's ministry such as the Jerusalem–Bethlehem–Bethany area and the cities and towns around the Sea of Galilee (Gerasa, Caesarea Philippi, Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum), and gives evidence that these were previously existing contacts. He also notes that Jesus is often depicted in the Gospels as associating with the wealthy. Interestingly, in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* 13, Joseph is reported to have made a bed for a rich patron. Thus, Oakman concludes, "might not Jesus' openness toward and knowledge of the social circumstances of the wealthy find a grounding in his previous experiences with them as a client?"[41] Thus even before Jesus began his ministry, his social circle, which served as the base of his movements during his ministry, was established.

Finally, I would add that some of Jesus's sayings are hard to explain if he is to be identified with the peasantry. Although obviously many of

40. Oakman, *Economic Questions*, 175–204. See also Case, *Jesus,* 202, 206, and 208, who had made many of the same observations.

41. Oakman, *Economic Questions,* 193.

Jesus's teachings appealed to the Palestinian peasants (though their interpretation of his teachings might have been different from what he intended), some of his parables betray a nonpeasant mindset. These would especially be the parables of the Wicked Tenants and the Talents.[42] The parable of the Wicked Tenants, found in all three Synoptic Gospels and in the *Gospel of Thomas* (Mark 21:1–9 and par.; *Gos. Thom.* 65), certainly exhibits a point of view that is not from the peasantry. In this parable, all too realistic in its details, the tenants refuse to pay their rent on the vineyard. Repeated attempts by the owner of the vineyard, the absentee landlord, to collect result in violence on the part of the tenants. Finally, the landlord must destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others to rent (Mark 12:9). The wicked ones both in the Synoptic version and in the *Gospel of Thomas* are clearly the tenants. In the *Gospel of Thomas* the owner of the vineyard is called a "good man"; and in Matthew's version of the parable (21:41) the tenants are called "wicked men." Yet, as M. Hengel has shown, tenants often felt such hostility toward the landowners because the landowners were oppressive and exploitative. Such outbreaks of violence must have been rather common in the ancient agrarian economies, as the Zenon Papyri attest.[43] But Jesus tells a parable in which the wicked ones are peasant tenant farmers. This may not in itself prove that Jesus was not of the peasantry but it is surely suggestive.

The next parable is equally suggestive. In the parable of the Talents, two versions of which appear in the double tradition commonly called Q (Matt 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27; *Gos. Naz.*), the wicked person again exhibits peasant-like behavior. The persons extolled in the canonical tradition—although both Matthew and Luke have interesting differences of detail—are those who take risks with the money entrusted to them and increase it. On the other hand, the one who buries the money entrusted to him—a behavior consistent with the peasant's reluctance to take risk[44]—is the one condemned. Interestingly, in the version of the

42. This insight was suggested to me by Professor A. Dewey of Xavier University.

43. See Hengel, "Gleichnis von den Weingärtnern." Cf. Derrett, "Fresh Light."

44. See Scott, *Moral Economy,* 18, who writes that at the core of peasant values is a very conservative outlook with respect to change of any kind. Therefore they do not view risk taking in the same light as a modern capitalist since the risk could mean excessive hardship or even death to their family. Thus they prefer old technologies, poor as they may be, which yield a consistent crop to new, unproven technologies. Peasants value survival and maintenance over change and improvement. Such economic imperatives and their concomitant value system are called by Scott the "moral economy" or "subsistence ethic." Cf. on this also Redfield, *Peasant Society,* 70–73, 137,

parable given in the *Gospel of the Nazarenes*, the three servants are called to account in a different way. One has wasted the master's money with harlots and is imprisoned; one has increased the amount entrusted to him and is rebuked; one has hidden his talent and is received with favor. This version of the parable, then, takes the point of view and value system of the peasant. Which version is closest to that of Jesus?[45] If either of the canonical versions is to be preferred, then once again Jesus has separated himself from the peasantry.

Thus I conclude that Jesus came from the artisan class. The answer to my second question is that Jesus as a leader of a mass movement fits the pattern established above for peasant movements generally, for the ancient Greco-Roman world, and for Palestine in the Second Temple period: He came from outside the peasantry.

Why Would Jesus Have Been a Candidate for Leadership?

The evidence for answering this question is less certain than above, but what I present below is at least suggestive. I submit that Jesus's networking as a carpenter enabled him to establish relationships with both peasants

who describes the "little tradition" of the peasants as very conservative. Scott's theory draws heavily on Moore, *Social Origins*. Scott's theoretical perspective on peasantry is followed by Migdal, *Peasants*. His theory is opposed by the political-economy theory of Popkin, *Rational Peasant* and the class-conflict theory of Paige, *Agrarian Revolution*. See the theoretical descriptions in Thilly, *Mobilization to Revolution*; and Paige, "Social Theory."

45. The scholars of the Jesus Seminar, for example (see Funk and Hoover, *Five Gospels,* 255–56, 373–74), concluded that the canonical version is very near to the actual words of Jesus. However, Malina and Rohrbaugh (*Social Science Commentary,* 150, 389); and Rohrbaugh, "Peasant Reading," 32–39, suggest that the version in the *Gos. Naz.* is the original, claiming that Westerners see erroneously in this parable "a kind of homespun capitalism on the lips of Jesus." But somebody has told the parable from the canonical and nonpeasant perspective. Was it Jesus, the Q community, or Matthew and Luke (independently of one another)? The last possibility seems remote. The differences in detail between Matthew and Luke suggest that they have worked independently and thus either used the same source or sources (in which the canonical version of our parable was found). That means, if Malina and Rohrbaugh are correct, that the Q community would have changed the parable from Jesus's original peasant-oriented version (similar to that in the *Gos. Naz.*) to the nonpeasant canonical version. But I can see no good reason for that to have been done. Since one can just as easily conclude that Jesus's parable was like the canonical version, it seems best to do so.

and the elite, with both rural and urban peoples. This networking resulting from his work in the urban centers of Galilee exposed him to urban culture, to the ideas of the Great Tradition. Therefore Jesus was a good candidate to become a broker, acting as intermediary between peasants and the elite. In other words, he articulated their needs and wants. We should not expect, however, that Jesus's goals and agenda were the same as the peasants. As I explained above, the peasants often had more limited goals than their leaders.

The crafts in the ancient world included making leather products and cloth products, pottery production, carpentry, masonry, and metal working.[46] All of these trades are attested in the sources for Palestine as well.[47]

Historians agree that most artisans worked very hard but were usually able to earn enough to live simply.[48] They were usually not wealthy, but neither were they starving. Occasionally, however, some craftsmen could attain a level of affluence if their skills were especially in demand,[49] or if they could afford slaves to mass-produce their goods.[50] Archaeologists have discovered a family of well-to-do artisans in Palestine as well, the family of Simon the Temple Builder, buried in Tomb I on Givat ha-Mivtar, north of Jerusalem.[51] This was a family of craftsmen who did hard manual labor but attained a measure of financial success since they could afford both a tomb in a rather high-priced area and ossuaries.

Artisans did not enjoy a high social standing among the Greeks or Romans. Herodotus writes that the Egyptians and other foreigners regard craftsmen as low on the social scale, and the Greeks also have accepted this attitude (2.167). Aristotle, although he allows that some of the crafts are necessary for a society (*Pol.* 4.3.11–12; cf. Plato, *Resp.* 2.396b–371e), regards the artisans as inferior beings. Artisans are much like slaves (*Pol.* 1.5.10) and they, the day laborers, and the market people are clearly inferior to other classes, even farmers (*Pol.* 6.2.7; 7.8.2.).

Xenophon also has Socrates denigrate the artisans. In some cities, says Socrates, they cannot be citizens (*Oec. 4.1–4).* The same attitude can

46. Michel, *Economics of Ancient Greece*, 170–209.

47. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 177.

48. Burford, *Craftsmen*, 138–43; Mossé, *Ancient World*, 79; Hock, *Social Context,* 35.

49. Burford, *Craftsmen*, 141; Hock, *Social Context*, 34.

50. Mossé, *Ancient World*, 90–91.

51. Tzaferis, "Jewish Tombs," 18–22.

be found in later Greek authors such as Dio Chrysostom (see *Or.* 7,110), Lucian of Samosata (see *Fug.* 12–13), and Celsus (see Origen, *C. Cels.* 6.36) as well as in important Roman authors such as Cicero (see *Off.* 1.42 and *Brut.* 73)—although Cicero also admits that artisans are useful to the city (*Rep.* 2.22)—and Livy (see 20.2.25).[52]

This demeaning attitude toward artisans from higher-status people stemmed from the effect some artisan trades had on the body, disfiguring it or making it soft because of a sedentary lifestyle (Socrates in Xenophon, *Oec.* 4.1–4; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 7.110). In addition, an artisan was not considered an adequate defender of his city in contrast to a peasant farmer (Socrates in Xenophon, *Oec.* 4.1–4). We must bear in mind, nevertheless, that this was the attitude of the elite toward artisans, not the attitude of the artisans themselves or of the other classes.

But the same attitude seems not to have prevailed among Palestinian Jews. The rabbinic sources extol both manual labor (*m. 'Abot* 1:10; 'Abot R.Nat. B XXI, 23a) and teaching one's son a craft (*m. Qidd.* 4.14; *t. Qidd.* 1.11; *b. Qidd.* 29a). Artisans often receive special recognition (*m. Bik.* 3.3; *b. Qidd.* 33a), and many of the sages were artisans.[53] Josephus also seems to have regarded artisans highly. He praises their skills in building the temples (*Ant.* 3.200; 8.76), in forming sacred vessels (*Ant.* 12.58–84) and in constructing towers (*War* 5.175). He never refers to artisans using the pejorative term "mechanical workers" (βαναυσος). It is suggestive that the only other artisan leader of a mass movement listed above, Jonathon the weaver, also had Jewish followers (see *War* 7.438).

That artisans in antiquity would travel from their home villages to work on large construction projects is well known. It is quite plausible, therefore, that Jesus and his family worked in other towns in Galilee, such as Tiberias and Sepphoris, which began construction sometime between Jesus's youth and early adulthood,[54] and perhaps even in Jerusalem.

In the first place, there are clear examples in the Mediterranean world of artisans traveling to distant building sites. Building temples and other public works almost always required importing craftsmen from surrounding cities. There was in general a shortage of craftsmen in the building trades (carpenters, masons, sculptors), especially from the

52. Hock, *Social Context,* 35–36; Burford, *Craftsmen*, 29, 34, 39–40; MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 115–16.

53. Büchler, *Economic Conditions,* 50; Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 177; Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie,* 2:249–51.

54. Overman, "Who Were the First Urban Christians?" 160–68.

fourth century BCE on. This shortage necessitated that craftsmen travel from city to city. A. Burford[55] cites, for example, the case of city of Epidauros in Greece, which, in order to build the temple of Asclepius (c. 370 BCE), imported masons, carpenters, and sculptors from Argos, Corinth, Athens, Paros, Arcadia, and Troizen. Argos itself had to hire Athenian masons to complete its long walls in 418 BCE. Athens also needed carpenters and masons from Megara and Thebes to rebuild its walls in the 390s BCE.

This shortage of craftsmen was especially acute in the Roman period, according to Burford. The cities of North Africa, Asia Minor, Persia and Palmyra imported craftsmen for their building projects with the local artisans contributing what they could. Burford affirms, "For unusual projects such as public works, no city, not even Athens, had a sufficiently large skilled labor force to do the job by itself."[56]

Since such was the case throughout the Mediterranean world, we should expect that in Palestine in the Herodian period artisans from surrounding cities and villages were used for large building projects. This expectation is confirmed by a passage in Josephus. Josephus related that Herod the Great made the following preparations to build his temple in 20 BCE: "He made ready 1,000 wagons which would carry the stones. He gathered 10,000 of the most skillful workers . . . And he taught some to be masons and others to be carpenters" (*Ant*. 15.390).

Josephus's description of Herod's collection and training of carpenters and builders in preparation for building his temple implies there was a shortage of artisans in Jerusalem for this massive construction project. Furthermore, the temple was only completed in the procuratorship of Albinus (62–64 CE), which caused, Josephus reports, 18,000 artisans to be out of work (*Ant.* 20.219–20). Thus the temple required—though perhaps Josephus's figure is exaggerated somewhat—a large force of artisans throughout most of the first century CE.

The evidence from Josephus confirms that an extensive public works project like building the temple required recruiting and importing—even training—artisans from distant cities and employing them over long periods of time. Surely the construction of Sepphoris and Tiberias required a similar contribution of skilled labor. Given the urbanization of Lower

55. Burford, *Craftsmen*, 62–67.

56. Ibid.

Galilee (e.g., Magdala, Capernaum and Scythopolis[57]) and also of the Tetrarchy of Philip (Caesarea Philippi, Bethsaida Julius), one can well imagine that an artisan in the building trade would be in demand. Since such was the case in the Greco-Roman world in general—causing artisans to move frequently from job to job—we should expect the same to have been true in Galilee. It is even possible that Jesus and his family worked on a temple in Jerusalem from time to time.[58]

R. Batey's assertion[59] that carpenters in particular were necessary for the construction of public works—erecting scaffolding, forms for vaults, cranes, and ceiling beams—also is confirmed not only by the examples from classical Greece listed above but also from Josephus. Josephus celebrates the importance of carpenters for building Solomon's temple (*Ant.* 7.77, 340, 377), Zerubbabel's temple (*Ant.* 11.78), and Herod's temple (*Ant.* 15.390). Carpenters also figure prominently in building city walls (*War* 3.173).

Therefore we can say with certainty that there were several continuous and massive building projects during Jesus's youth and early adulthood. Second, we can be reasonably confident that these projects would have necessitated the services of skilled carpenters, even from distant cities and villages. Jesus and his extended family could easily have worked in Sepphoris, Tiberias, and other Galilean cities, and even in Jerusalem. Opportunities were there for this family to have experienced urban culture and to have risen to the same level of economic comfort as the artisan family of Simon the temple builder.[60]

This observation is more important when readers realize that there was a great cultural gap between the city and the country in antiquity. As recent a historian as G. Aföldy[61] has accepted this estimate of ancient society, but he stands at the head of a long line of previous historians. The rural populations in the eastern Roman Empire for the most part seems to have maintained their native languages and customs, whether Coptic in Egypt, Celtic in Asia Minor, or Aramaic in Syria.[62] On the other hand, in the cities people spoke Greek, many were literate, and most

57. Overman, "Who Were the First Urban Christians?" 160–68.

58. Oakman, *Economic Questions,* 186–93.

59. Batey, *Jesus and the Forgotten City,* 68–82.

60. Tzaferis, "Jewish Tombs"; Haas, "Anthropological Observations."

61. Aföldy, *Die römische Gesellschaft*, 10.

62. See de Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle,* 10, 13; Rostovtzeff, *Roman Empire*, 193, 346; MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 46.

were in touch to some degree with the great institutions and ideas of Greco-Roman society, the Great Tradition. This was especially true of the aristocrats but to some extent was even true of the urban poor, according to G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, since the urban poor may have "mixed with the educated" in some way.[63] Such mixing could take place in Palestinian cities not only in synagogues but in theaters, amphitheaters and hippodromes, as well as in the courts of justice.[64] Thus there was a cultural gulf between the rural peasants and even the urban poor. As L. White has observed about medieval agrarian societies, "cities were atolls of civilization . . . on an ocean of rural primitivism."[65] Thus any experience on Jesus' part in cities, any "mixing" among the urban culture of first-century Palestine could have been significant.[66]

Conclusions

Thus the answer to my first query is that there does seem to be a pattern with respect to the social origins of leaders of peasant mass movements. The common pattern, both in the Mediterranean world of antiquity and in more recent peasant societies, is that the leaders come from nonpeasant classes. These persons may be intellectuals, dissident landed aristocrats, priests or other religious leaders, artisans, teachers, or village leaders. The pattern is fairly consistent in the Mediterranean generally and in Palestine in particular.

63. De Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 13.

64. In general for the benefits of the urban proletariat in living in the city, see Jones, *Greek City,* 285. For Palestine in particular, see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People,* 2:46, 48, 54, and 55. As the authors write (55) even though Josephus (*Ant.* 15.268) declared that theatres and amphitheatres were alien to Jewish custom, "it should not be assumed that the mass of the Jewish population did not frequent them."

65. White quoted in de Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 10. Cf. Migdal, *Peasants*, 9, who points out that the peasant who goes regularly to the city will develop higher "information-processing capacity" and will more quickly adopt modern ways than one who stays home. The city has a strong influence on peasants for change.

66. Horsley (*Archaeology,* 43–65) challenges that Sepphoris and Tiberias were as cosmopolitan as other cities in Palestine, e.g. Caesarea Maritima and Scythopolis. He describes these cities as having "only a thin veneer of cosmopolitan culture" (59). At the same time Horsley argues that the culture of Sepphoris and Tiberias was "Roman-Hellenistic." We should probably think of the differences between the countryside and the cities, that is, between the Little Tradition and Great Tradition respectively, as more of a continuum. Some villages were more urbanized than others, and some larger towns and cities were less urbanized and cosmopolitan than others.

Second, Jesus was also a leader of a mass movement as the sources, both canonical and classical, indicate. Since he was probably an artisan, he too fits the leadership pattern for a peasant mass movement. It would, therefore, seem incorrect to term Jesus a peasant or proletarian.[67]

The most difficult question to answer (the third question proposed) is, why would an artisan have been a candidate for peasant leadership? Here I can only suggest (because the evidence is not conclusive) that Jesus as an itinerant worker met urban people and experienced urban life before his ministry. He was conversant with the Great Tradition, the ideas of the elites, and that made him better able to articulate the needs and goals of the peasants. Because Jesus was seen as an effective broker, as Sabean termed it, he would have been a candidate for a peasant leader.

What made the peasants actually follow him is, however, another matter. Doubtless, his teaching about the evils of wealth and the wealthy, and his promise of the kingdom of God, would have been what attracted them to him. Of course we must always bear in mind that the peasantry probably had a different interpretation of Jesus's words than he himself had. As J. C. Scott remarked (quoted above), peasants are seldom ideologically sound. Thus Jesus's own agenda may have been misunderstood by the masses.[68]

67. See especially Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 421, who terms Jesus a "Peasant Jewish Cynic." For Jesus as a proletarian, see the survey in Bammel, "Revolution Theory." Bammel cites especially the work of R. von Pöhlmann (*Geschichte*).

68. Does John 6:15 recall an historical event? See Brown, *John*, 1:249–50. Brown argues that the Fourth Evangelist would not have invented a story that claimed that some people thought of Jesus as a king, especially if this Gospel was written in the midst of tensions between Rome and the church during the reign of Domitian. If Brown is correct, then this records one such difference between Jesus's vision of his leadership and the vision of the masses.