

# Fall Meeting 2008

## Report of the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins

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Where on earth is Caesarea Philippi and why does it matter? If you had never considered this question before, there are many reasons to consider it now.

### Christianity in Syria

At the fall meeting (October 17–18) the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins began the next phase of its work in the investigation of significant places in the origins of Christianity by taking a closer look at Syria. Why Syria? The Roman province of Coele-Syria lay just to the north of Galilee; in it were some of the major cities of the Roman east, especially Antioch and the ancient coastal towns of Tyre and Sidon; and it was to Syria that many Jews fled during the first Jewish revolt against Rome in the years 64–70 C.E. Among those refugees there would have been many followers of Jesus who settled into the great cities of Syria. That is why for many years scholars have found Syria attractive as the putative home of those nascent Christian groups that produced the gospels, Mark, Matthew, and John. Especially attractive is Antioch, the largest city with the largest Jewish population and an urban infrastructure to accommodate the imagined school activity that underlay the gospels as literary products. But there are many other places in Syria that might have played host to significant groups of Jesus followers. One of them is Caesarea Philippi.

### Caesarea Philippi and the Gospels

The attentive student of the synoptic gospels will recall Caesarea Philippi as the site where Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ in the Gospel of Mark (8:27–30) and later in Matthew (16:13–20) and Luke (9:18–22). The odd thing about this scene is its location: Caesarea Philippi was in the far northeastern corner of Galilee—in the borderland of Galilee and southern Syria. Why would the author of the Mark take Jesus and his followers all the way up to this out-of-the-way place to stage the scene of Peter's confession?

John Wilson has been involved for a long time in the excavations of Caesarea Philippi and has recently published the results of his long years of thinking about this site. His paper for the seminar summarized his case for

### Ballot 1 Coele-Syria as a Roman Province J. Andrew Overman

Q1 Events and place names in the Synoptic tradition along the "Tyre-Damascus corridor" are not out of the ordinary or exceptional. They reflect the development of that route very early in the Roman period and are authentic.

<b>Fellows</b>	0.68 Pink	14% R	79% P	03% G	03% B
<b>Associates</b>	0.70 Pink	19%	75%	03%	03%

Q2 Occasional North-South antipathy in the gospels, including the fourth gospel, makes the most sense when viewed in light of more recent tensions dating from the late Seleucid and Hasmonean periods and not ancient tribal rivalries.

<b>Fellows</b>	0.87 Red	62% R	38% P	00% G	00% B
<b>Associates</b>	0.89 Red	67%	33%	00%	00%

Q3 The region around Caesarea Philippi was an important socio-political, strategic area by the time of the Emperor Augustus.

<b>Fellows</b>	0.98 Red	93% R	07% P	00% G	00% B
<b>Associates</b>	0.96 Red	89%	11%	00%	00%

### Ballot 2 Early Christians in Syria Michael Fuller

Q1 Membership of the 2nd/3rd century house church falls between 50 and 100 individuals.

<b>Fellows</b>	0.61 Pink	25% R	32% P	43% G	00% B
<b>Associates</b>	0.49 Gray	22%	26%	30%	22%

Q2 Early Christians at Dura Europos and Aila did have divided space during worship by gender.

<b>Fellows</b>	0.63 Pink	18% R	54% P	29% G	00% B
<b>Associates</b>	0.64 Pink	33%	38%	17%	13%

Q3 The Jewish and Christian communities, when religious/ethnic minorities in 2nd/3rd century Roman Cities, avoided conflict.

<b>Fellows</b>	0.63 Pink	14% R	64% P	18% G	04% B
<b>Associates</b>	0.60 Pink	21%	42%	33%	04%

Q4 The 3rd century Christian community at Dura Europos intentionally used the symbol of the cross on the door-frame of the Baptistry.

<b>Fellows</b>	0.56 Pink	21% R	36% P	32% G	11% B
<b>Associates</b>	0.68 Pink	35%	35%	30%	00%

### Explanation of voting

<b>Black</b>	not true (0–.25*)
<b>Grey</b>	probably not true (.2501–.5)
<b>Pink</b>	probably true (.5001–.75)
<b>Red</b>	true (.7501–1) *Weighted average

**Ballot 5**  
**Phoenicians, Itureans and Judeans**  
**Sean Freyne**

- Q1 The geographic indicators make the territory of Tyre the most likely location for the origins of Mark's gospel.
- |                   |           |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.59 Pink | 21% R | 39% P | 33% G | 06% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.82 Red  | 55%   | 37%   | 05%   | 03%   |
- Q2 The position of Herakles/Melkart as city god of Tyre provides the context for the Markan portrayal of Jesus as mighty in word and work.
- |                   |           |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.54 Pink | 09% R | 45% P | 42% G | 03% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.58 Pink | 05%   | 65%   | 27%   | 03%   |
- Q3 Caesarea Philippi is the most suitable location for the Matthean community initially in view of the commissioning of Simon Peter there and the portrayal of Jesus as healer and rival of Pan.
- |                   |           |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.63 Pink | 24% R | 48% P | 18% G | 09% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.86 Red  | 66%   | 29%   | 03%   | 03%   |
- Q4 The place of Syria in the restoration theology of early Judaism is vital for Matthew's understanding of the twofold mission.
- |                   |           |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.62 Pink | 03% R | 80% P | 17% G | 00% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.61 Pink | 06%   | 74%   | 18%   | 03%   |

a pre-Markan tradition comprising the scenes in Mark 8–9 associated with Caesarea Philippi. First, Mark says Jesus approached “the villages of Caesarea Philippi,” which describes the unusual situation perfectly. Caesarea Philippi itself was a civic center devoid of common residential housing. The people of the city lived in several villages surrounding the urban core. Following Peter's confession, Mark narrates the transfiguration, in which Jesus ascends a high mountain—presumably Mt. Hermon, which towers above Caesarea Philippi and on whose summit are found shrines to the gods who were thought to appear there. In Mark it is Elijah, the prophet of the north, who appears with Moses to the disciples. Finally, upon returning to the city, Jesus heals a boy with epilepsy-like symptoms. In the city there was for centuries a shrine to Pan, whose devotees believed was in the habit of possessing children, who might exhibit epilepsy-like symptoms as they prophesied on behalf of the god.

Twenty-five years ago, Ted Weeden argued persuasively for a Galilean provenance for the Gospel of Mark. He agreed with Wilson's assessment and now is willing to be more specific: Mark was written in Caesarea Philippi. His reasons are similar: strong local color and specific local reference points in the narrative. Weeden thinks there are equally strong reasons for locating Matthew in the area as well. Sean Freyne weighed in on the question of Matthew with similar results: Caesarea Philippi. If all these scholars are right, we will have uncovered a major

**Ballot 6**  
**Antioch in History and Material Culture**  
**Daniel Schowalter**

- Q1 In an ancient city like Antioch, it is possible to use artistic representations such as floor mosaics to help make judgments about the social and ethical values of some segments of the population.
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|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.63 Pink | 17% R | 59% P | 21% G | 03% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.63 Pink | 11%   | 68% P | 21%   | 00%   |
- Q2 The presence and benefactions of a series of Roman leaders in first-century BCE Antioch underscores that the province of Syria was one of the most important regions in the empire at that time, and should influence our reading of texts from that region.
- |                   |           |       |       |      |       |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.79 Red  | 46% R | 43% P | 11%G | 00% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.70 Pink | 32%   | 53%   | 11%  | 05%   |
- Q3 Herod the Great's role in civic Improvements for Antioch, specifically his part in the great colonnaded way, indicate a regional influence and a connection to Rome that added to his reputation in the empire, but distracted from his ability to rule in Judea.
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|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.59 Pink | 19% R | 42% P | 35% G | 04% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.56 Pink | 21%   | 32%   | 42%   | 05%   |
- Q4 The search for “identity” in cities of the Roman world must extend beyond a simple embracing of the imperial agenda and take seriously the reactions and resistance of the local population, even if those local indicators are difficult to identify.
- |                   |          |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.85 Red | 59% R | 38% P | 03% G | 00% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.80 Red | 56%   | 28%   | 17%   | 00%   |

area of early Christian activity. When polled on these issues, the seminar agreed that there is a good probability that Mark was written in the area (Pink), and Matthew as well (Pink).

A generation ago little was known about this region. But Wilson's excavations have revealed it to have been a major administrative center, established first by Herod the Great, who built a large temple there dedicated to Augustus, and later by his son, Philip, who made it the capital of his regional kingdom in the years following his father's death. Jews and gentiles lived in its surrounding villages, and the palace of Herod was in sight of the popular shrine to Pan—the reason for its popular designation, Paneas, or later “Baniyas,” as it now appears in the literature. Many Jews fled here during the Jewish War to escape the violence further south. But it was also to this place that Titus brought his victorious army after sacking Jerusalem, along with several hundred captives, who were slaughtered in various cruel spectacles staged for the entertainment of the troops and perhaps the intimidation of other would-be challengers. Matthew's “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matt 5:9) would have found wide assent here.

### Ballot 7

#### Paneas/Caesarea Philippi and the Gospels John Francis Wilson

- Q1 The territories of Philip, son of Herod I, are the backdrop for a number of traditions about the historical Jesus.
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|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.62 Pink | 12% R | 65% P | 19% G | 04% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.62 Pink | 11%   | 67%   | 19%   | 04%   |
- Q2 The northern territories of Agrippa II are the backdrop for much of the ministry of Jesus, as that tradition is presented by the Gospels of Mark and Matthew.
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|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.62 Pink | 04% R | 81% P | 12% G | 04% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.63 Pink | 07%   | 74%   | 19%   | 00%   |
- Q3 A number of pericopae in Mark and Matthew indicate an early Jesus-Tradition originating in the North, quite plausibly in the region of Caesarea Philippi.
- |                   |           |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.60 Pink | 04% R | 74% P | 22% G | 00% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.70 Pink | 19%   | 74%   | 07%   | 00%   |
- Q4 Various players in the Synoptic Tradition, such as Herodians, “the Gentiles,” proselytes, Pharisees, Syro-Phoenicians, Tyrians and Sidonians, etc., were in fact present in the North during both the ministry of the historical Jesus and the composition of the Gospel of Matthew.
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|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.58 Pink | 00% R | 74% P | 26% G | 00% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.65 Pink | 04%   | 89%   | 07%   | 00%   |
- Q5 Certain political characteristics found in the Region of Caesarea Philippi at the time of the 1st Revolt such as the strong presence of the Roman army and the general pro-Roman stance of the Jewish population have significance in interpreting the Synoptic Tradition.
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|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.62 Pink | 00% R | 89% P | 07% G | 04% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.65 Pink | 11%   | 75%   | 14%   | 00%   |
- Q6 Certain significant cultural, social and religious differences existed in Caesarea Philippi before and after the 1st Revolt which are particularly significant in understanding the development of the text of Matthew and perhaps Mark as well.
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|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.58 Pink | 04% R | 67% P | 30% G | 00% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.63 Pink | 07%   | 78%   | 11%   | 04%   |
- Q7 Among the most significant of these differences are the infusion of Jewish and Jewish-Christian immigrants from Judea and southern Galilee and the pattern of urbanization at Caesarea Philippi suggested by recent excavation.
- |                   |           |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.60 Pink | 07% R | 67% P | 26% G | 00% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.62 Pink | 04%   | 82%   | 11%   | 04%   |

### Ballot 8

#### Caesarea Philippi: Birthplace of Gospels Theodore J. Weeden, Sr.

- Q1 The Provenance of the Gospel of Mark is in a village of Caesarea Philippi.
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|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.52 Pink | 04% R | 52% P | 41% G | 04% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.63 Pink | 15%   | 61%   | 21%   | 03%   |
- Q2 The Gospel of Mark indicates a dependency on the Book of the Parables of 1 Enoch for the development of the Son of Humanity concept.
- |                   |           |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.62 Pink | 11% R | 67% P | 19% G | 04% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.75 Pink | 39%   | 48%   | 09%   | 03%   |
- Q3 The Provenance of the Gospel of Matthew is in a village of Caesarea Philippi.
- |                   |           |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.56 Pink | 04% R | 63% P | 30% G | 04% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.67 Pink | 24%   | 52%   | 24%   | 00%   |
- Q4 The author of the Gospel of Matthew drew upon landscape features at Mount Hermon to construct his account of Jesus commissioning Peter (Matthew 16:17-19).
- |                   |           |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Fellows</b>    | 0.56 Pink | 07% R | 59% P | 26% G | 07% B |
| <b>Associates</b> | 0.75 Pink | 30%   | 64%   | 06%   | 00%   |

363–64; *War* 1.404–6). It was to have been located in the vicinity of Baniyas in 19 B.C.E. Schowalter reported on this temple at the Spring 07 meeting of the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins. This time Overman helped the seminar understand more of the significance of this temple and other imperial installations in the region. Coele-Syria was the eastern frontier beyond which lay the rival Parthian empire to the east, and thus of great strategic importance to the empire. In settling here, Jesus followers would have found themselves in the heart of the imperial east. It is in that context that we shall have to understand their declarations of a new “empire of God” (*basileia tou theou*), and their use of such imperial titles as *kurios* (Lord), *soter* (Savior), and *huios tou theou* (Son of God) to honor their hero, Jesus, who had been executed on a Roman cross.

#### Other Places

But there are other places to explore in Syria as well. Schowalter introduced the seminar to the material culture and relevant archaeological record of Antioch, where many scholars still locate much of the very earliest Christian activity. Freyne offered an overview of what might be known about Tyre and Sidon, also places of very early Christian activity. His suggestion that Mark was written in Tyre also won the tentative approval of a majority of Fellows (Pink), suggesting that the Fellows were not persuaded by Wilson and Weeden to the exclusion of other possibilities. Also left to explore are the vast regions of eastern Syria, where (possibly) the earliest extant Christian church is located in Dura Europa. The seminar

*Continued on page 32*

### The Significance of Roman Syria

Caesarea Philippi, or Paneas, was located on the road known as the “Way of the Sea,” at about the mid-point between Tyre and Sidon to the west, and Damascus further inland to the east. It is on that road that J. Andrew Overman and Daniel Schowalter have been excavating an enormous imperial temple, probably the temple dedicated to Augustus mentioned by Josephus (*Ant* 15.359,

## Jesus Seminar Fall 2008 *Continued from page 22*

was treated to an overview of this site by the Syrian archaeologist, Michael Fuller, whose expertise on the material culture of eastern Syria is a welcome addition to the seminar. These places and the Jesus followers who settled in them remain as future agenda.

### Crossan on Christian Origins

Finally, the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins initiated a series of planned conversations with scholars who have made significant contributions to the study of Christian origins in recent years. Few have been as important to the Jesus Seminar's efforts in this arena as John Dominic Crossan. So on Friday afternoon, in a session that foreshadowed Crossan's evening lecture to the seminar, Fellows engaged Crossan in conversation about the various theses that have surfaced in his work over the past decade and a half. The conversation was set up by a paper from Bernard Brandon Scott assessing the impact and significance of Crossan work. The occasion proved so fruitful that the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins voted to continue the practice with a conversation in the spring with James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester on their landmark work, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*. **4R**

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