



## Book Review

Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses

1–2

© The Author(s) / Le(s) auteur(s), 2022

Article reuse guidelines/  
Directives de réutilisation des articles:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/00084298221111184

journals.sagepub.com/home/sr



### **Archaeology and the Itinerant Jesus: A Historical Enquiry into Jesus' Itinerant Ministry in the North**

J. A. Lloyd

Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022.

Based on the author's doctoral thesis awarded by the University of Otago, this significant and original monograph explores Jesus' itinerancy as depicted in Mark 1:14–8:30 in dialogue with literary sources and archaeology.

Our earliest narrative account of Jesus' life, Mark's Gospel, depicts Jesus engaged in an itinerant ministry in Galilee and surrounding regions. Yet the reasons which generated Jesus' itinerancy remain underexplored in biblical scholarship. For Lloyd, the reasons are to be found in the practicalities of his prophetic program for the restoration of Israel. This included necessary travel to reach a wide audience, to spread the message about the kingdom of God, and to call people to repentance. An additional motive Lloyd observes may have been to evade capture by the ruling authorities; a tactic for staying one step ahead of Antipas and his forces. Economic factors (such as upheaval due to hardship, indebtedness, and so on) are quickly dismissed (55), a point to which I will return below.

In her opening chapter, Lloyd surveys Jesus' itinerancy in the Synoptic Gospels and Q, reviews major perspectives of Markan scholarship, and outlines the purpose and overview of her study. She is primarily concerned with addressing the "plausibility" of the extent of Jesus' travels in northern Galilee, including where and how far Jesus travelled, and why he may have done so. Lloyd argues the plausibility of Mark's depiction is dependent on at least two factors: first, the Jewish character of the regions Jesus is said to have visited (so as for him to have reason to visit there); and second, the regions being populated enough to attract large crowds. Chapters are arranged according to Jesus' itinerancy in Galilee (Chapters 2–4) and surrounding regions (Chapters 5–8), the latter including such places as Gaulanitis, the regions of Tyre and Sidon, and the Decapolis. It is beyond the scope of this review to go into the intricacies of each chapter, but in short, Lloyd argues the regions Jesus is said to have traveled to were "predominantly Jewish" during the early decades of the first century (167, 390). She also argues that Galilee was densely populated comprising some 200 towns and villages.

Early in the study and again in the conclusion Lloyd classifies Mark as belonging to the genre of Greco-Roman *bioi* and lists some consequences of this designation. For example, the presentation of the Gospel's contents is arranged topically rather than chronologically. Mark's geographical scheme is also possibly part of the Evangelist's narrative construction and should not be necessarily taken at face value. I would add that ancient biographies also heighten the individual agency of their protagonists, depicting them stereotypically as either powerful politicians who lived within and in control of wider social structures or as philosophers who lived outside of them and challenged them. This means we may need to look elsewhere—such as to wider social and economic forces—to explain pushing and pulling factors which generated Jesus' itinerant ministry.

Lloyd sidesteps some of these issues, instead building her argument on an uncontroversial view in scholarship that Jesus was a Jewish prophet: hence the reasons for itinerancy were primarily theologically motivated. In concluding, then, I want to explore where Lloyd's study might be enhanced through consideration of economic forces that were impacting the lives of ordinary people in rural Galilee (and possibly elsewhere). How can economic and theological factors be brought together? Put another way, how were the prophetic motivations attributed to Jesus' itinerant ministry potentially grounded in material conditions and social structures of his time and place? For example, Herod Antipas' urbanization projects during Jesus' upbringing generated economic changes resulting in disruptions to peasant life and likely exacerbated the unequal distribution of wealth—despite a modest overall rise in living standards (cf. 55 n. 360). Moreover, Josephus reports that the building of Tiberias resulted in forced displacements (*Ant.* 18.36-38), a point frequently ignored by scholars of Galilee. Lloyd refers to this passage in passing (136) but does not explore its implications. Did similar displacements occur elsewhere?

Mark does not bother to explicate what economic factors were involved when Jesus abandoned his livelihood in Nazareth. Although not a major concern for Mark, it is certainly "plausible" to imagine scenarios wherein perceived hardship provoked the abandonment of work and periods of itinerancy for Jesus or others involved in the early movement. Discontentment resulted in the emergence of several Jewish prophetic and millenarian movements during the first century (e.g., *Ant.* 19.109-119; 20.97-98; *War* 2.261-262). Through such channels, those impacted could invest in a future Golden Age wherein their troubles would be put right by God, and the elite perceived to be responsible for upheavals would be justly punished.

Whatever we make of such economic considerations, Lloyd is to be congratulated on producing an important contribution to our knowledge of the extent and character of Jesus' itinerant ministry. The fresh and lucid insights advanced by this book make it vital reading for appreciating the world of the historical Jesus generally and his itinerant ministry in particular. The real strength of the study is found in its detailed, rich, and thoroughgoing synthesis of archaeological data which is put into conversation with Mark's narrative account. It demands careful engagement and consideration.

Robert J. Myles  
*Wollaston Theological College and University of Divinity*