

JESUS: MYTHING THE POINT?

Schooling Some University Professors

Michael Paulkovich

In my first book, *No Meek Messiah*, I provided an exhaustively researched list of 126 authors who lived in the first and second century who should have written about “Jesus of Nazareth” but did not. I recently discovered one particular attempt to rebut my research by Joel Baden and Candida Moss, who coauthored a 2014 article in *The Daily Beast* titled “So-Called ‘Biblical Scholar’ Says Jesus a Made-Up Myth.”¹

Three problems struck me about their critique: (1) they use the term *so-called biblical scholar* to refer to me, (2) they seem surprised anyone would question the historicity of Jesus, and (3) for university professors, their research seemed substandard. Despite its age, this critique merits a thoughtful response.

On the first point, they did not get “biblical scholar” from me or from the venues for which I write. I am a space systems engineer, inventor, and writer. You don’t have to be a biblical scholar to do investigative journalism regarding Bible claims. Moss and Baden mention my book by name; couldn’t they flip it over and read the bio on the back?

Regarding the second point, they seem unaware that Jesus Myth Theory is not new. We have documentary evidence of people in the first and second century who questioned the four Gospels (such as Marcionites, Ebionites, Jews, and Pagans), or believed Jesus was a magical phantom, not a man (such as the Christian sect of Docetes). Of course, starting in the fourth century in the Occident, it was illegal under penalty of death to disbelieve the Jesus tales. Finally during the Enlightenment, some brave individuals dared research and question New Testament claims once again.

Regarding the third point, let me enumerate their errors in general order of appearance in the article.

1. They wrote that one of my “main pillars” is the assumption that “most writers should have mentioned Jesus, since he was the Son of God ...” I never made such a claim. My point is stated clearly in *No Meek Messiah*: if Jesus was as famous as the Bible claims, *somebody* during the first century—outside of the authors of the New Testament fantasies—would have written about him.

1. Moss, Candida, and Baden, Joel, “So-Called ‘Biblical Scholar’ Says Jesus A Made-Up Myth,” *The Daily Beast*, October 5, 2014.

2. Moss and Baden wrote “There is nigh universal consensus among biblical scholars ... that Jesus was, in fact, a real guy.” They are guilty of a logical fallacy here. Who is overwhelmingly most likely to become a biblical scholar? Believing Christians.

3. Moss and Baden claimed that “some” of my ancient writers are “a little too ancient,” and they (erroneously) declare that they died before the first century. But they don’t list “some”—just one, Asclepiades of Prusa.

And they got that wrong. It seems they used Wikipedia as their source. If you type “Asclepiades of Prusa” into Wikipedia, it brings up a man with that name who died in 40 BCE. Antonio Cocchi noted that there were over forty men named Asclepiades in Prusa (Cocchi, *The Life of Asclepiades*, 2). I provided a description of my Asclepiades on page 331: “Famed physician under Hadrian, born 88 CE in Prusa, Asclepiades wrote several books on internal and external medicines.” I cited Joseph Thomas and John Platts as my sources; both of their books are available online.

Moss and Baden implied that there are others from my list who lived before Jesus. Fact is, all 126 are first- and second-century personalities who should have written about Jesus of Nazareth but did not.

4. Some of the writers on my list were philosophers, so Moss/Baden made the claim that philosophers “aren’t really known ... for their interest in current events.” This is both a smoke screen and a *non sequitur*. As stated in my book, my dialectic regarding this mode of investigation is as follows: if Jesus was as famous as claimed in the Bible, *everyone in the region who could write* would have recorded him. Here’s page 201 of *No Meek Messiah*:

The Bible claims Jesus’s fame “went throughout all Syria” (Mt 4:24), and “all Galilee” (Mk 1:28). Jesus was followed by “great multitudes of people” (Mt 4:25 & 8:1) ... and his words went “unto the ends of the whole world” as we learn from Paul in Romans 10:18.

5. Moss and Baden claim the “vast majority” of those on my list “have none of their writings preserved for us, or mere fragments at most.”

If they had read pages 329–348, they would have discovered that we still have the writings of the *majority* of these writers. In fact, the works of at least eighty-four of the men and women in my table of 126—a *vast majority*. And the books of half of these individuals are available from sources such as Amazon or Barnes and Noble.

6. Moss and Baden claim: “A good number of the writers listed weren’t writers at all, but consuls, generals, even a king (Vardanes I) and an emperor (Tiberius).”

I included Vardanes in my list and explained (349) that he ruled Parthia in the first century, writing epistles and other texts not far from Judea. I included Emperor Tiberius, observing (347) with scholarly references that “Tiberius wrote Greek poems, a lyric poem on the death of L. Caesar, and a commentary of his own life, which Suetonius made use of for his *Life of Tiberius* ...”

7. Moss/Baden claim: “... in his own day Jesus wasn’t

that important. He was just another wannabe messiah ...” Now, I’ve watched some of Baden’s lectures and read his articles, and he is a Bible scholar (for what that’s worth) and a true believer. And, as a believer, he seems passionate about figuring out new ways to rationalize blind faith in the Bible tales. Pious devotees need to realize that emotion has a bad name in scholarship: it clouds rational discussion and blurs lucid observation.

Baden redefined “authentic truth,”² saying that it is “very much in line with what you think, yourself, as opposed to what the Bible actually might say.” It appears he is saying: “Don’t believe what the Bible says, believe *what you want it to say*.” This is how pious minds try to bend reality in their favor using the fun-house mirrors of credulity.

Again, the Bible claims that Jesus’s fame went “unto the ends of the whole world.” That would be astonishingly impressive if it were *anywhere near* true. Moss and Baden, if Jesus “wasn’t that important,” are you admitting that the Bible assertions are lies?

8. Moss/Baden wrote: “The argument isn’t improved by saying that Jesus was a God who should be able to journal in his leisure time. Deities don’t write things by hand. They tend to let human beings do the brunt of the transcription (you feel me, Moses?)”

One wonders the precedent for this claim—where did they get information on the activities of deities? Indeed, mermaids and leprechauns don’t write either. So what?

9. Moss and Baden declared “Paulkovich has written nothing about himself—we have no biographical data on him. (In truth, it is hard to find almost anyone with less of a web presence than Michael Paulkovich—including, for the record, no Twitter account.)”

Their article was published October 2014—it’s true that at that time I had only published about twenty-five articles in various humanist journals and a couple dozen in science and technical journals. A simple Google search would have provided Moss and Baden with the biographical information they claimed is nonexistent.

On my “web presence,” which for some reason they consider a point of pedigree, we created the website nomeekmessiah.com two years before their article was published. (We recently removed most content due to the new edition under a different title: *Beyond the Crusades*, published by American Atheist Press.)

Their ultimate insult seems to be that I didn’t have a Twitter account; yet I had joined Twitter two years before their article. For the record.

10. Some of the writers on my list were doctors, so Moss and Baden wrote: “Jesus was supposed to have a gift for healing, so he probably didn’t take his annual checkup seriously.” It’s almost Haiku but not a relevant or cogent point.

One of Jesus’s gifts for healing involved removing “devils” from people. Due to this superstitious nonsense, Christians discarded scientific method for centuries and relied

2. Baden, Joel, “What Use Is the Bible?” *The Nantucket Project*. 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIXfDyoYK8Q>

on exorcism and burning at the stake (you feel me, Hippocrates?).

Conclusion

One wonders whether Baden and Moss follow standards of intellectual integrity and rigor imparted by their universities, Yale and Notre Dame. And, dear Ms. Moss and Mr. Baden, you both owe me an apology for a critique so replete with errors, shoddy research, and logical fallacies. Send me a tweet!

Further Reading

Cocchi, Antonio. 1762. *The Life of Asclepiades*. London: T. Davies.

Paulkovich, Michael. 2016. *Beyond the Crusades: Christianity's Lies, Laws and Legacy*. Cranford: American Atheist Press.

Platts, John. 1825. *A Universal Biography*. London: Sherwood Jones and Co.

Thomas, Joseph. 1915. *Universal Pronouncing Dictionary of Biography and Mythology*. B. Lippincott Company.

Michael Paulkovich is a NASA engineer and freelance writer, a contributor to FREE INQUIRY and *Humanist Perspective* magazines, and an author of the series "Dogma Watch" for *American Atheist*.

1 “You don’t have to be a biblical scholar to do investigative journalism regarding Bible claims.”

2 “If Jesus was as famous as the Bible claims, *somebody* during the first century—outside of the authors of the New Testament fantasies—would have written about him.”

3 “We still have the writings of ... at least eighty-four of the men and women in my table of 126—a *vast* majority.”

ABSTRACT

A critique of myth theory by two professors from Yale and Notre Dame fails to hold water.
