

Per Bilde

The Originality of Jesus

A Critical Discussion
and a Comparative Attempt



Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht



Per Bilde, The Originality of Jesus

Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica (SANT)

Edited by

Eve-Marie Becker, Ole Davidsen, Jan Doehorn, Kasper Bro Larsen,
Nils Arne Pedersen

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my late wife, Associate Professor in Classical Archaeology, Pia Guldager Bilde, who died the 10th of January 2013.

My book is written in deep admiration of the fundamental contributions to the modern research on the historical Jesus made by Hermann Samuel Reimarus, David Friedrich Strauss, Johannes Weiss, Albert Schweitzer, E.P. Sanders, Gerd Theissen, Séan Freyne, Richard Horsley, James H. Charlesworth, Dale C. Allison, Bart D. Ehrman, John P. Meier and Maurice Casey.

Introduction to SANt

Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica addresses all scholars working in the fields of theology, biblical studies, religious studies, Patristics, Jewish studies and classics. The series focuses on the New Testament that needs to be interpreted in various ways in terms of methodology and subject matter as well as in regard to its original setting in the Hellenistic-Roman and Jewish worlds. Furthermore, it needs to take into account the vast history of reception from Early Christianity to Modernity. Rather like a prism the New Testament illuminates diverse processes of religious and cultural formation, reformation and transformation in and beyond the Western hemisphere.

This academic series, edited by scholars working together in the research group 'New Testament Studies' at Aarhus University, Denmark, is intended to serve as a Nordic platform for building academic bridges between the scholarly traditions of continental Europe and Anglo-American academia.

The editors are delighted to launch this series with an important monograph by Per Bilde. By considering "Jesus' originality" this volume points towards the historical preconditions of early interpretations of Jesus in the New Testament. Without reflections such as these we would find it difficult to understand the rise of the early Christian movement and the collection of texts called the New Testament.

Future volumes will examine the diverse and manifold perspectives in light of which the New Testament has to be read and interpreted, from the pre-history of the New Testament and its contextualization in the Hellenistic-Roman and early Jewish worlds to current discourses on application in university, society and church life. The New Testament thus remains a constant challenge for textual interpretation and interpreters.

Aarhus, March 31st 2013 Eve-Marie Becker, Ole Davidsen, Jan Dochhorn,
Kasper Bro Larsen, Nils Arne Pedersen

Einleitung in die Serie SANt

Die Reihe „*Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica*“ wendet sich an alle, die im Bereich von Theologie, Bibelwissenschaften, Religionswissenschaften, Patristik, Judaistik und Klassischer Philologie forschen und lehren: Sie betrachtet das „Neue Testament“ als frühchristliches Textcorpus, das sowohl in Hinsicht auf seine entstehungsgeschichtliche Kontextualisierung in der Hellenistisch-Römischen und -Jüdischen Welt als auch im Blick auf seine enorme Wirkungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte über die patristische Zeit hinaus bis in die Moderne methodisch und thematisch vielfältig zu untersuchen ist. Das neutestamentliche Textcorpus erweist sich hiermit gleichsam als Brennglas für das Verstehen der abendländischen und inzwischen weit über das Abendland hinausreichenden Prozesse von religiöser und kultureller Formation, Reformation und Transformation.

Die Reihe wird von den Dozenten, die in der Forschungseinheit „New Testament Studies“ an der Universität Aarhus zusammenarbeiten, herausgegeben. Sie versteht ihre geographische Verankerung als Teil wissenschaftlicher Programmatik: Als südlichste *academia* im Verbund der nordischen Länder ist die dänische Wissenschaftskultur in besonderer Weise um ihre Anbindung an Kontinentaleuropa und um den Brückenschlag der europäischen mit der anglo-amerikanischen Wissenschaftstradition bemüht.

Die Herausgeberin/die Herausgeber freuen sich, mit dem vorliegenden Band – einer wichtigen Monographie von *Per Bilde* – die Reihe eröffnen zu können: Mit der Frage nach der ‚Originalität Jesu‘ werden wir zu den historischen Voraussetzungen zurückgeführt, ohne die die frühen Jesusdeutungen in neutestamentlicher Zeit und so auch die Entstehung der neutestamentlichen Textsammlung kaum zu verstehen sind.

Weitere Bände von SANt werden hier in gewissem Sinne anknüpfen und zugleich zeigen, in welchen Dimensionen der Interpretation sich das ‚Neue Testament‘ befindet und bewegt: Von seiner Vorgeschichte und seiner Situierung in der hellenistisch-römischen und frühjüdischen Welt bis zur jeweils aktuellen Applikation in Wissenschaft, Gesellschaft und dem Leben der Kirchen bleibt das ‚Neue Testament‘ eine ständige Herausforderung für die Textinterpretation und seine Interpreten/Interpretinnen.

Aarhus, 31. März 2013 Eve-Marie Becker, Ole Davidsen, Jan Dochhorn,
Kasper Bro Larsen, Nils Arne Pedersen

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations of the titles of writings from the Jewish Bible (the Old Testament), the New Testament and the Old Testament Apocrypha as in the OSB, p. XXIII – XXIV.

Abbreviations of the titles of the writings in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha as in Charlesworth 1983, vol. 1, pp. XLV – XLVII.

In addition to the current English abbreviations the following abbreviations are used in the present book:

Ant.	Josephus, <i>Antiquitates Judaicorum</i> .
Ap.	Josephus, <i>Against Apion</i> .
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeological Review</i> .
BCE	Before the common era.
Bell.	Josephus, <i>Bellum Judaicum</i> .
BH	<i>Biblia Hebraica</i> .
CD	The Damascus Document from Qumran.
CE	The common era.
ch.	chapter.
col.	column.
DTT	<i>Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift</i> .
Ed.	Editor.
et al.	et alii.
FS	<i>Festschrift</i> .
GBL	Gads Bibel Leksikon, København 1 st edition 1965, 2 nd edition 1998.
HE	Eusebius, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i> .
Hrsg.	Herausgegeben, that is “edited” (by).
HSHJ	<i>Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i> , edited by T. Holmén and S.E. Porter, Leiden – Boston 2011.
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i> .
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i> .
JB	The Jewish Bible.
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> .
JSHJ	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i> .
LCL	The Loeb Classical Library.
LXX	Septuaginta.
par.	with synoptic parallels.
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i> .
NTH	<i>Den nytestamentlige tids historie</i> (Ed. S. Pedersen Århus 1994).
NT	The New Testament.
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i> .

OSB	The Oxford Study Bible (cf. above in the preface).
OT	The Old Testament.
Q	Indicates the synoptical material common to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and missing in the Gospel of Mark.
QH	The Thanksgiving Hymns from Qumran: 1QH: The Thanksgiving Hymns from Qumran, found in cave no. 1.
QM	The War Scroll from Qumran: 1QM: The War Scrolls from Qumran, found in cave no. 1.
QpHab	Commentary on the prophet Habakkuk from Qumran: 1QpHab: The Commentary on the prophet Habakkuk from Qumran, found in cave no. 1.
QpPs (a)	Commentary on the OT Psalms from Qumran: 4QpPs (a): Commentary on the Psalms from Qumran, found in cave no. 4.
QS	The Rule of the Community from Qumran: 1QS: The Rule of the Community from Qumran, found in cave no. 1.
Qsa	The Rule of the Congregation from Qumran: 1Qsa: The Rule of the Congregation from Qumran, found in cave no. 1.
Qtest	Testimonia from Qumran: 4QTest: Testimonia from Qumran, found in cave no. 4.
RGG	Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart.
RvT	Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift.
StTh	Studia Theologica.
ThL	Theologische Literaturzeitung.
ThWNT	Theologische Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament.
vol.	volume.
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft.
ZThK	Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche.

Preface

During the last 30–40 years an incredibly large number of books on the historical Jesus have been published. Most of them, however, are not general attempts at interpreting Jesus and his project as a whole. They are either specialised studies of limited aspects such as Jesus' relationship to the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, like Ådna 2000, research history, like Borg 1994a, background history, like Charlesworth 1992a, or popular introductions to the study of the historical Jesus.¹

Such specialised studies are important and indispensable for Jesus research as a whole, but all of them rest on the basis of comprehensive interpretations of Jesus and his project such as the general ideas of the liberal, dialectical, existential, liberational or evangelical theology. More specifically, they often rest on fundamental interpretations of Jesus such as Hermann Samuel Reimarus ((1774–1778) 1835), David Friedrich Strauss ((1835–36, 1969) 2012), Ernest Renan ((1863) 1947), Adolf Harnack ((1900) 2005), Rudolf Bultmann ((1926) 1970), S.G.F. Brandon (1967), E.P. Sanders (1985), John P. Meier (1991–2009), Dale C. Allison (1998, 2010); James D.G. Dunn (2003), Martin Hengel – Anna Maria Schwemer (2007), Maurice Casey (2010) and Oakman 2012. Such basic interpretations of Jesus have been made from time to time in order to collect and synthesize the great number of earlier specialised studies with the intention to establish new comprehensive interpretations of Jesus and thus to contribute to the general progress in the study of the historical Jesus.

The present book on Jesus' originality is one more such fundamental attempt.² However, it is neither another contribution to the general interpretation of Jesus, nor a detailed study of one particular aspect of his person or activity. Rather, it is an attempt to get one step closer to the historical Jesus by comparing him to related contemporary figures. With the overall aim of contributing to clarifying the question of the originality or uniqueness of the historical Jesus I have chosen to submit the issue of Jesus' originality – i. e. the possibly innovative nature of his message and his project – to a detailed study: How did Jesus generally differ from other figures, primarily in contemporary Judaism, with whom he may reasonably be compared?

Accordingly, this book is the result of my comparative research, and therefore it is primarily addressed to the international community of Jesus

1 Such as Kee (1990) 1991; Harrington 2010; Bauckham 2011, cf. the present work, ch. 2.3–4.

2 The present book is a revised and updated English translation of Bilde 2011a.

scholars. At the same time, however, I have written it in a language and a style that should be understandable to the general interested public.

The present book represents an attempt at innovation in Jesus research. Neither the subject of the originality of Jesus nor a comprehensive comparative examination of Jesus and his project has so far been undertaken (cf. ch. 3.1; 5.2).

Accordingly, the main subject of the present book is Jesus' originality: Is it possible at all to claim that Jesus was original in any sense? If this question can be answered in the affirmative, which implies an extensive and complex investigation, how can the originality of Jesus then be defined? Does Jesus' originality consist in his person's unique character of being both man and god? Do we find Jesus' uniqueness in his being the only one who has descended from heaven from where he brought his divine message of salvation of the sinful human race, and after which he returned to his heavenly home? Does the specific character of Jesus consist in his claim to be the only true son of the only true god and the saviour of all men, as it is said in the Christian creeds? In other words, does the originality of Jesus consist in his bringing the unique Christian religion into this world?

Or do we find Jesus' possible uniqueness in his belief to stand in a particularly close relationship with the Jewish god, whom he called his "father" (in Aramaic: *'abba'*)? Or can Jesus be claimed to be unique by virtue of his ethical message, as it has often been assumed, especially in the Jesus research of liberal theology of the last part of the 19th and the first part of the 20th century, and today in the so-called American Jesus Seminar? Does the originality of Jesus consist in his double call for love to god and men (Matt. 22.34 – 40 (par.)) and in the so-called golden rule,³ as many people today would answer to the question about the originality of Jesus?

Or was it perhaps his parables and his other well-known peculiar stories and distinctive formulations that separated him from other contemporary religious teachers?

Or do we find Jesus' possible originality in his eschatological proclamation that the kingdom of god – whatever that expression means – was finally at hand? Or does Jesus' special character consist in his call for people to follow him in his activity and destiny? Or did his miraculous exorcisms, healings, resurrections and other wonders sort out Jesus from similar and comparable figures?

Others believe that the uniqueness of Jesus lies in his destiny, the fact that he – presumably because of his message and his activities – was eventually convicted and sentenced to death by the Romans so that he can be said to have suffered martyrdom for his cause.

Or do the sources on Jesus which have been handed down not contain

3 Matt. 7.12: "Always treat others as you would like them to treat you: That is the law and the prophets." cf. Lk. 6.31 and ch. 3.4

anything that may be interpreted as unique? Does it make any sense at all to talk about originality in Jesus' case? And if so, what does it mean to refer to Jesus as "original"?

It is questions of this kind that I hope to clarify, discuss and answer in the present book. In advance, my readers might think that the question of Jesus' originality must already have been analysed thoroughly, and that it must have been completely exhausted by earlier research. To my own surprise, however, a detailed review of the literature on this subject (ch. 3) has shown that this is far from being the case, whatever the cause may be.

As it will be demonstrated below (ch. 2), during the last 30–40 years it has been surprisingly rare that the question of the historical Jesus' originality has been explicitly raised at all. And when it finally has been touched upon, it has mostly been crossed over superficially, perhaps because it was assumed to have been answered already. In the relatively few cases where this issue has been considered, it has also been given quite different answers, as I have already suggested above. A chapter in this book, therefore, aims at reviewing the responses that have been given to this question in earlier research (ch. 3).

During my work in preparing this book I have realised that it has been impossible for me to obtain a satisfactory answer to the question of Jesus' originality without entering into a rather detailed dialogue with recent Jesus research, partly generally, partly in a number of specific areas. Therefore, in the present book I could not escape giving a much more detailed review of recent Jesus research (ch. 2) than the one I thought to be sufficient in my previous book on the historical Jesus (Bilde 2008a, 273–276).

A serious discussion of the issue of Jesus' originality, however, requires first and foremost a proper comparison between Jesus and a series of more or less related contemporary figures (ch. 5). But precisely this task has been most neglected in contemporary Jesus research (cf. ch. 1.7; 5.2). Naturally, there exist a few comparisons between Jesus and related figures, primarily the Teacher of Righteousness in the Dead Sea Scrolls (second or first century BCE), John the Baptist (first half of the first century CE) and Simon Bar Kochba (early second century CE), but also figures like Buddha (ca. 560–ca. 480 BCE), Socrates (ca. 470–399 BCE), Alexander the Great (336–323 BCE), Mohammed (ca. 570–632 CE) and Sabbatai Zvi (1626–1676). However, none of these comparisons are entirely satisfactory, and this assessment is my main reason for presenting in ch. 5.3–7 the most comprehensive comparative study and discussion of the historical Jesus so far.

A satisfactory comparison between Jesus and such related figures, however, requires that we know what we are talking about. First, this applies to the term the "historical Jesus." Therefore such a comparison requires a definition of the "historical Jesus" as well as a well-founded hypothesis about what the historical Jesus stood for and intended. This intention of Jesus I call his "project," while other scholars term it "die Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger" (Reimarus (1774–1778) 1835) or "the aims of Jesus" (B.F. Meyer 1979). In

continuation of my previous book in Danish about the historical Jesus (Bilde 2008a, 284–285), therefore, in ch. 1.3 I present a definition of the “historical Jesus,” and in ch. 4, under the inspiration of the most important parts of recent Jesus research, I present a revised overhaul of my previous hypothesis about the project of the historical Jesus (cf. Bilde 2008a, 259–264). On this basis, in ch. 5 I compare this reconstruction of the historical Jesus with a range of figures, which, to varying degrees, can be said to resemble him.

Furthermore, I strongly emphasize that this book, even more than its predecessors, is the result of a fruitful interaction between my former Josephus research in the period between 1970 and 2000 (in particular 1983a, 1988, 1998c) and the Jesus-research I have concentrated on over the last 10–15 years⁴ (cf. ch. 1.8).

Finally, I wish explicitly to declare that, as its Danish predecessors, the present book is written from a sceptical and critical attitude towards Christianity which has been gradually developed during my studies during the last 50 years of the preconditions, development and establishment of the early Christian religion (cf. Bilde (2001) 2006). Thus the present book is written in the spirits of Baruch de Spinoza (1632–1677), Herrmann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768), David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874), Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) and Gerd Lüdemann. Like Reimarus and Lüdemann, I have come to believe that the differences and the lack of continuity between the historical Jesus and the Jesus movement after his death, that is between “the historical Jesus” and “the Christ of the proto-Christian faith” (cf. my footnote 67), are greater than the resemblances and the continuities between the two, although these are remarkable (cf. ch. 3.9; 4.10; 5.2; 6.6).

The reasons for this belief is first and foremost that the historical Jesus was an acute eschatological prophet and messianic pretender whose expectations of his own messianic enthronement and the establishment of the kingdom of god in Jerusalem were denied and disappointed by what really happened when Jesus was arrested, prosecuted, condemned to death and executed (cf. ch. 4).⁵

In addition, soon after the death of Jesus his movement reinterpreted his eschatological message by transforming it to a positive, soteriological interpretation of his death. A whole series of positive reinterpretations of Jesus’ death culminated in the belief in his resurrection and ascension (cf. Bilde (2001) 2006, 198–215; 2008a, 235–258). This implied that Jesus after his death had in fact been enthroned as the Messiah, however, not in Jerusalem, but in heaven, at the right side of the Jewish god. This reinterpretation was linked to another one which transformed Jesus’ eschatological project which

4 Cf. Bilde (2001) 2006a; 2008a; 2008b, but also 1978; 1979; 1980; 1983b. In other publications I have also tried to combine these two areas of research, cf. Bilde 1980; 1981; 1984; 1996a; 1996b; 2005b.

5 Several scholars reject this obvious interpretation, e. g., J.M. Robinson 2011, 3218.

originally was limited to the Jewish people to include the whole world and all human beings (cf. Bilde 2008b).

Thus the eschatological project of the historical Jesus was very quickly reinterpreted and transformed from a particularistic Jewish project about the reestablishment of the twelve tribes of the Jewish people, the enthronement of Jesus, the creation of a new covenant, and the construction of a new eschatological temple in Jerusalem to a cosmic interpretation of Jesus as lord over the whole cosmos (cf. Phil 2.6–11) and to a universal movement including all human beings (cf. Matt. 28.18–20).

In the present book's text and footnotes a publication is only identified by indicating the author's family name followed by its year of publication. In cases where there are more than one author of the same family name, I add the initial (or the initials) of the author's first name(s), e. g., E.P. Sanders 1985. If there are several editions of a given publication, the year of the original version is indicated in brackets whereas the version used and quoted in this book is indicated without parenthesis, e. g. Bilde (2001) 2006.

In the present book I further follow the general rule that a reference to one work in the secondary literature is given in parentheses in the text, while references to more than one work are placed in footnotes.

The English translations of the biblical writings (including the Jewish Bible's or the Old Testament Apocrypha) quoted in the book are borrowed from *The Oxford Study Bible* (OSB), edited by M. Jack Suggs *et al.*, New York (1976) 1992.

The English translations of the writings from The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha quoted in this book are borrowed from *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H. Charlesworth, Vol. 1–2, New York etc. 1983 and 1985.

The English translations from the Dead Sea Scrolls quoted in this book are borrowed from Florentino Gacia Martínez: *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, Leiden-New York-Cologne (1992) 1994.

The English translations of the writings of Josephus quoted in this book are borrowed from *Josephus with an English Translation* by H.St.J. Thackeray *et al.*, The Loeb Classical Library, I–IX, London – Cambridge MA 1926–1965.

The English translations of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish book titles and quotations from such works are my own.

In all translations from ancient authors I put in square brackets brief explanations that to me appear necessary to understand the text.

A list of the abbreviations used in this book follows after the table of contents.

I thank my late wife, Associate Professor in Classical Archaeology, Pia Guldager Bilde, who died on the 10th of January 2013, for her critical reading

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

It is the intention of the present study to answer the question of whether the historical Jesus can be claimed to have spoken and/or acted in a peculiar, innovative or original manner (cf. ch. 1.6), and, if so, to what extent this can be claimed to have been the case.

1.2 Why a new contribution on Jesus' originality?

Why is it necessary, just now, to consider this subject? This has to be done for several reasons:

First, I have personally neglected to address this issue explicitly in my previous contributions to Jesus research. The question of Jesus' originality may be said to have been touched upon indirectly in my attempt to determine the nature of Jesus' project,¹ but so far I have only preliminarily investigated the explicit question about Jesus' possible originality.²

Second, my studies of the history of Jesus research on this problem have demonstrated that the question of Jesus' possible originality has received only scant attention, particularly in research since 1970. This fact surprised me because it would seem to be of great importance and therefore might be expected to have received a lot of attention in modern Jesus research.³ A great

1 Cf. Bilde (2001) 2006, 123–170; 2008a, 157–232.

2 Cf. Bilde 2005a. It is necessary to distinguish between the issue of the possible originality of the human being Jesus from Nazareth, the historical Jesus, a subject which has been examined by very few scholars, and the question of the unique character of the religious belief in Christ or Christianity, which has been discussed on a much larger scale. These two issues represent two different historical problems. The first one is examined in this book, and the second one has recently been discussed in, e.g., Knitter 1985; 1997; Cowdell 1996; Hick – Knitter 1987; Braaten 1992; Swidler – Mojzes 1997; Zahl 2003.

3 A large number of scholars have not treated this topic explicitly: Reimarus (1774–1778) 1835; Strauss (1835–1836) 1969; Case 1927; Norman Perrin (1963) 1967; Barrett 1967; Dodd 1970; Schillebeeckx (1974) 1976; B.F. Meyer 1979; Schneemelcher 1981, 54–73; Horsley (1987) 1993; 1995; 2003; 2008c; 2010a; 2012; Stanton (1989) 1993; Crossan (1991) 1993; 1994; Stuhlmacher 1992, 40–161; Thiering 1992; Burrige (1994) 2005; Martin (1994) 1995; Becker (1995) 1996; Stegemann – Stegemann (1995) 1997; Young (1995) 2008; (1998) 2009; Theissen – Merz 1996; Frederiksen (1999) 2000, 266; McKnight 1999; Witherington 1999; Freedman – McClymond 2001; Abrahamowitz 2002; Bock 2002a; 2002b; Kazén 2002; Ebner (2004) 2007; Berger (2004)

number of scholars take it for granted that Jesus was original or unique, but do not bother to justify this assumption.⁴ Only a few scholars have addressed this issue explicitly,⁵ and, as far as I know, only in relatively few cases has the question of the originality of Jesus been the subject of a separate investigation.⁶

2007; White 2004; W.R. Herzog 2005; Pitre 2005; Bauckham 2006; 2011; Beavis 2006; Bird 2006; Catchpole 2006; Evans 2006a; Levine 2006; Levine – Allison – Crossan 2006; Meeks 2006; Stanley 2006; Hengel – Schwemer 2007; Swidler 2007; Destro – Pesce (2008) 2012; Kvalbein 2008; Keener 2009; Allison 2010; Casey 2010; Puig i Tàrrach 2010; W. Stegemann 2010; White 2010; Borchert 2011; Lohfink (2011) 2012; Bond 2012; Horsley 2012; Küng 2012; Oakman 2012; Scholl 2012. This situation corresponds to the fact that the question of the originality of Jesus has not been treated explicitly in one single contribution in the first ten volumes (2003 – 2012) published so far of the *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*. Regrettably, the same is the case in a number of recent encyclopaedia on Jesus: In Geert Hallböck's article on "Jesus" in the Danish *Gads Bibelleksikon* (vol. 1, 368 – 374 (Hallböck 1998b)), for example, the question of Jesus' possible originality is not mentioned at all. The same is true for Jürgen Roloff's contribution on "Jesus von Nazareth" in *RGG* (vol. 4, 2001, 266 – 267); the article on "Jesus Christ" (of 48 pages) in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; James H. Charlesworth's guide to the study of the Historical Jesus (2008); Craig Evans' *Encyclopaedia of the Historical Jesus* (2008); Daniel J. Harrington's *Historical Dictionary of Jesus* (2010); Holmén – Porter (2011), a massive compilation of 111 individual articles written by nearly all the most well-known Jesus scholars, of which not a single one treats the question of Jesus' originality explicitly. In my opinion, it is an open question whether this voluminous work in four volumes containing 3652 often elementary and repetitive pages contributes very much to the general progress of the study of the historical Jesus.

- 4 Thus, e. g., Banks 1975, 262; Goshen – Gottstein 1997. A third example is David Flusser. He has chosen to give the English version ((1997) 2007) of his German book on Jesus ((1968) 1975) the following title: *The Sage from Galilee. Rediscovering Jesus' Genius*. A fourth example is Craig L. Blomberg: In a contribution on the historical reliability of the Gospel of John, Blomberg writes: "But the time has come for Johannine scholars to push back one stage further and ask the question many students of the Synoptics have raised of Matthew, Mark, and Luke: Does an origin with the unique genius of the historical Jesus not account for the bulk of John's material better than a Jewish-community formulation in the early church, ..." (2001, 82). A fifth example is Bock – Wallace 2007, 3: "... Jesus is a very distinct figure..." however, without any explanation and justification. In a similar way on the book's last page: "Jesus is not one among many but is unique in his religious impact and claims" (2007, 227, cf. 23.26.213). A sixth one is Dale Allison: "I find it very difficult to come away from the primary sources doubting that I have somehow met a strikingly original character" (2010, 23). Similarly Machovec (1972) 1976, 206; A.F. Segal 1986, 82, 86; W.R. Herzog 2005, 231; Freeman (2009) 2011, 30; Borchert 2011, 219.
- 5 For example Harnack (1900) 2005, 34 – 36; Jülicher 1909; Holtzmann 1911, 1, 173 – 175. 405 – 420; Cadbury (1937) 1962, 68 – 71; Banks 1975, 262 (Jesus' attitude to the Law of Moses was unique); Stein (1978) 1994, 109 – 111; D. Hill 1979; Carver (1982) 2004, 24 – 25; E.P. Sanders 1985, 137 – 140. 239 – 240; 1990; Zeitlin (1988) 1990, 61 – 72.99 – 114; Meier, 1, 1991, 171 – 174; Funk (1993) 1997, 330 – 233; Sung 1993, 282; Alexander (1997) 2005; Allison 1998; 2010, 82 – 88; Zahl 2003; Dunn 2005, 69 – 78; Helleman 2007; Holmén 2012, 14 – 17.
- 6 So far I am only aware of Braden 1957; Zeitlin (1988) 1990; E.P. Sanders 1985; 1990; Cowdell 1996; Swidler – Mojzes 1997; Zahl 2003. However, the last-mentioned three works primarily discuss the originality of the "Christian" Jesus, i. e., Christ, or, more precisely, Christ's unique character (cf. footnote 1,2). Even though Amer 2009 cannot be regarded as an examination of the originality of Jesus, this work can be understood as an interpretation of the essence of Jesus' message. On the other hand, this small book does not contain any comparison between Jesus and other, Jewish and non-Jewish, comparable personalities, and therefore I do not consider this work as a monographic investigation of the originality of Jesus. The same is true of E.P. Sanders 1990, a printed

Third, a treatment of this topic is required in connection with the discussion of the origins of Christianity. There can be little doubt that with Christianity emerging, something new and original gradually appeared (cf. Bilde (2001) 2006). Despite the numerous important preconditions to Christianity in Early Judaism and in the Hellenistic-Roman world it can hardly be doubted that the deification of Jesus and his central position already in the early Christian cult may be described as a *novum* in the history of religion.⁷ Therefore, we have to ask from where this new phenomenon came? Did it begin already with the historical Jesus?⁸

Fourth, in continuation of point three this idea that today we need a comprehensive examination of the originality of Jesus is supported by the observation that both parties, Christians and Jews, seem to have regarded the separation of early Christianity from the rest of Early Judaism around 100–120 CE (cf. Bilde (2001) 2006) as inevitable. It is therefore necessary to ask whether the innovation in relation to Judaism, which may be claimed to be involved in Christianity's gradual establishment as an independent religion, had any connection to the historical Jesus, or whether it can be considered to have been created entirely by the Jesus movement after the death of Jesus? At the same time these two last-mentioned questions also belong to the wider complex of problems that is often described as the issue of "continuity or discontinuity" in the relationship between the historical Jesus and the Jesus movement after his death.⁹

lecture containing the most qualified discussion so far of my subject. Perhaps the dialogue between Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes 1997 and Knitter 1997 comes closer to a proper attention to the issue of the originality of Jesus. On the other hand, these authors do not carry out any comparisons with Jesus either. The most comprehensive examination of my subject is Kearney – Zeitz 2009, first and foremost because this work compares Jesus with 27 contemporary Jewish and non-Jewish personalities. However, as I intend to demonstrate in ch. 5.2, Kearney – Zeitz 2009 does not distinguish properly between the historical Jesus and the Christ of the NT and later Christianity either (cf. footnote 1,2).

- 7 It is generally admitted that most of the traditional as well as the new religions in the Hellenistic-Roman period focussed on mythical, not historical deities. Furthermore, it is almost impossible to compare the religions that were concentrated on historical persons, first and foremost the ruler cult and the worship of Apollonius from Tyana, with Christianity (cf. ch. 5.4). This fact is due to our lack of knowledge of the number and the personal engagement of their adherents caused by the poverty of the existing sources (cf. Bilde 1998a, 43–73. 104–112; (2001) 2006, 276–284; 2008b).
- 8 This issue is discussed briefly in Flusser (1968) 1975, 175–177; Müller 2008a, 160, and more thoroughly in Zahl 2003; Ehrman 2009, 225–268; Bird 2010; Back 2011; Flores d'Arcais 2011. Barnett (2009) claims that Jesus not only regarded himself as the Messiah, but also identified himself with the Jewish god and thus regarded himself as divine (2009, 252–253). A related point of view has been argued in detail in several publications by Larry C. Hurtado (most comprehensively in 2003). This important issue is thoroughly discussed in Bilde 2008b and in the present work, ch. 3.9; 4.9; 5.2.1.
- 9 Cf. my preface and footnote 1,2 above. This question is discussed explicitly by Allison 1985, 142–162; Hampel 1990; Kazen 2002, 31; Wilckens (2002) 2005, I,1, 25–35; Zahl 2003; Catchpole 2006; Holmén 2007a (in particular in Holmén's introduction: 2007b, 1–16); 2012; Müller 2008a, 160;

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For the first time in the history of modern Jesus research Per Bilde aims his scholarly interest at the originality of the historical Jesus. Accordingly he examines the historical Jesus and 14 contemporary Jewish Palestinian figures who, in one or more respects, can be argued to be comparable to him. Focussing on the originality of Jesus in modern Jesus research and interpreting this originality Bilde comes to the conclusion that Jesus appears to be similar to a number of these figures, but that he can be regarded as unique in certain respects.

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