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The Jesus-story. Myth or Reality?: What do we know?

Anne Skjonsberg

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What do we know about the origins of Christianity? Has there really existed a person named Jesus as told in the New Testament and what is actually told of him there? How credible are these sources? The Gospels tell completely different stories of Jesus's life and family and also about the various events associated with him. Which story can we believe? Anyone who compares the texts of the four Gospels has trouble understanding Jesus’s actual life story. What is narrated from Jesus's parables and teachings corresponds largely to thoughts and ideas that were prevalent in many philosophical and religious circles in the centuries before and after the beginning of the Common Era. The main Christian dogmas were not adopted until the Councils of Nicaea in the year 325 and of Chalcedon in 451, more than three hundred years after Jesus's supposed life. It is only in the New Testament that we find mentions of Jesus. Several historians have concluded that other writings from the first century, which is sometimes used as historical documentation, in all probability, were forged by Christian copyists. The Book of Acts tells of Saint Paul's life and activities, but those stories do not match what is written in the so-called Pauline Epistles. What can we learn about Saint Paul from other sources? It is very doubtful that the writings of the New Testament were written in the first century of our era. The oldest known manuscripts are from the period 175-250 CE and were written in Greek. The oldest Greek version we know of is Luke's Gospel and this is dated to c. the year 200. The Book of Acts was not cited by other known sources before the year 177. A small papyrus fragment (6.4 x 8.9 cm), which is said to be from the Gospel of John, is dated to c. the years 125-150. It is only from the year 367 that there exists a paper saying that the scriptures now found in the New Testament should be right reading for the Christians, although a Christian Canon was not established until much later. What happened in the first two centuries of our era which later made Christianity evolve to a worldwide religion? Anne Skjønsberg has taken a closer look at these questions in this book

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