

LONG LIVE THE KING: THE FOURTH GOSPEL'S RESPONSES TO
GRECO-ROMAN SUSPICIONS CONCERNING MONARCHY

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Raymond Brown once wrote of the Fourth Gospel's 'attempt to make Jesus intelligible to another culture ... [by] presenting Jesus in a multitude of symbolic garbs'.² In this paper, I consider the kingly garb with which John dresses his protagonist.³ Would it have made Jesus intelligible to inquisitive Hellenistic readers? Perhaps more importantly: would it have made him attractive? My contention is that a reader well-versed in Roman political thought would have concerns about the idea of following a king—not so much because of a worry that the king might be a bad king, but rather because kingship is bad in the long term—and that the Fourth Gospel provides resources, whether crafted by its author, or merely fortuitous, to assuage such worries.

This paper adopts as its primary methodological mode reader-response criticism. The constructed reader (or auditor) is familiar with a broad range of Roman and Greek political thought, as witnessed to by authors such as Polybius, Cicero, Sallust, Seneca and Livy, though not necessarily with the specific texts which will be cited. Such a reader might be Gentile, but could also be Jewish (Josephus, for instance,

1. I would like to thank Mark Goodacre, Jed Atkins and the participants in their Fall 2016 seminars in John's Gospel and Roman political thought (respectively) out of which this research emerged. In addition to the anonymous reviewer from *JGRChJ*, I would also like to thank the participants in the University of North Carolina's Christianity in Antiquity group and in the Johannine Literature section of the 2017 SBL Annual Meeting for comments on previous versions of this paper.

2. Raymond Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 57.

3. By the notational convenience of the word 'John' for the author(s) of the Fourth Gospel, no conclusions regarding the puzzles of authorship and redaction of this work are intended (any more than they are by the ordinal 'Fourth').

knew Polybius's work).⁴ Certainly, some early Christian readers did feel tension between their 'classical' studies and Christian faith—'Jerome, notoriously had nightmares over whether his exposure to Cicero ... was preventing his being a good Christian'⁵—but our constructed reader is worrying at a time rather closer to the completion of the Fourth Gospel and is more reluctant than Jerome to abandon Ciceronian concerns as she contemplates following Christ. Must she reject her prior political beliefs (even if untheorized) entirely or can she understand John's version of the Christian message as making a novel claim within her established framework? This reader might be the recipient of attempts at initial evangelization or (perhaps more likely) a convert receiving further instruction. Encountering claims of kingship, a stock range of concerns are triggered for this reader. I will suggest that as she scrutinizes John's Gospel, she will be able to find, through diverse aspects of the presentation of Jesus, scope to envisage a form of kingship that evades such concerns.

Before turning to these concerns, and the responses which could be constructed, one must confirm that our reader would find herself confronted by claims of kingship. Among Brown's 'many garbs' of the Johannine Jesus, the importance of kingship may appear to be counter-indicated by the fact that Wayne Meeks could write in his dissertation that "'King" as a Christological appellative in the Fourth Gospel has never been the object of a special investigation'.⁶ He suggests, however, that this lacuna is not due to an inattentiveness to kingship on the part of the Fourth Gospel but to a scholarly over-emphasis on Davidic kingship as the only model which would have had currency for the ancient author⁷ and argues instead that John presents us with a Prophet-King modeled on Moses.⁸ Since Meeks's work, however, many other scholars have returned to royal motifs in John's Christological

4. See the arguments of Shaye Cohen, 'Josephus, Jeremiah, and Polybius', *HistTh* 21 (1982), pp. 366-81, and Arthur M. Eckstein, 'Josephus and Polybius', *CLAnt* 9 (1990), pp. 175-208.

5. Anthony Bowen and Peter Garnsey (eds.), *Lactantius: Divine Institutes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), p. 4.

6. Wayne Meeks, *The Prophet King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), p. 17.

7. This emphasis is still apparent, for instance, in Christoph Burger, *Jesus als Davidsohn: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (FRLANT, 98; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970).

8. Meeks, *Prophet King*, p. 21.

development. De Jonge's work, for instance, seeks to develop Meeks's insight by arguing that John redefines kingship in terms of sonship.⁹ Other scholars do see John as drawing on Davidic models, including Maarten Menken in his analysis of Jesus' betrayal by Judas, and Richard Hays, who finds echoes in John's use of royal lament psalms (taking David as their putative author).¹⁰ Busse situates John's kingship discourse in its Hellenistic context, and Richey explores resonances with Augustan Imperial discourse.¹¹ Recent dissertations attentive to Jesus' kingship in John's Gospel include those of Mavis Leung and Laura Hunt.¹² Rather than taking recent scholarly interest as our benchmark, however, it will be helpful to review first the explicit references to Jesus as king in John's text and then investigate the coherence of these references with the rest of Jesus' characterization to establish that a reader would be unlikely to be able to write off kingship claims as an embarrassing but ultimately eliminable feature of the narrative.

9. Marinus de Jonge, *Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977). In this view he is joined by John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 100 n. 76.

10. Maarten Menken, 'The Translation of Psalm 41.10 in John 13.18', *JSNT* 40 (1990), pp. 61-79; Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), p. 298, cf. 319. A similar view is argued in Gilsun Ryu, 'Messianism and Kingship in the Gospel of John: Comparison between the Fourth Gospel and the Psalms 2, 72, and 110', *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 16 (2017), pp. 125-40. This view may be contrasted with the view of Andrew Brunson (*Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John: An Intertextual Study on the New Exodus Pattern in the Theology of John* [WUNT, 2.158; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003]), who argues that Johannine use of Psalm 118 at Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem points not to Davidic kingship but to a reassertion of God's prior status as king.

11. Ulrich Busse, 'Metaphorik und Rhetorik im Johannesevangelium: Das Bildfeld vom König', in Jörg Frey, Jan G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmermann (eds.), *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language* (WUNT, 200; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), pp. 279-317; Lance Byron Richey, *Roman Imperial Ideology and the Gospel of John* (CBQMS, 43; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2007).

12. Mavis Leung, *The Kingship-Cross Interplay in the Gospel of John: Jesus' Death as Corroboration of His Royal Messiahship* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); Laura J. Hunt, *Jesus Caesar: A Roman Reading of John 18:28-19:22* (PhD Dissertation; University of Wales, Trinity St. David, 2017).

John's Explicit Presentation of Jesus as King

A form of the noun βασιλεύς appears sixteen times in John's Gospel, each time referring to Jesus.¹³ The first usage occurs at the climax of the first narrative unit of the Gospel, when Nathanael proclaims to Jesus 'Rabbi, you are the son of God, you are the king of Israel' (Jn 1.49). The title 'king' stands as the culmination of a series of titles that characters apply to Jesus in this first narrative unit of the Gospel, including 'Lamb of God', 'Messiah' and 'Son of God'. Jesus himself adds 'Son of Man'. 'King' does not serve as culmination simply by virtue of coming last in a list, but highlights a theme present in each of the other appellations: there were kingly aspects to Messiahship (consider, for instance, the parallelism in 1 Sam. 2.10); 'Son of God' is a frequent royal title in the Psalms for instance; and the one like a 'Son of Man' receives kingship in Dan. 7.13-14. In the early chapters of his Gospel, John merely has characters tell us these claims about Jesus without showing us why they should be true. For a reader who is not already convinced, Nathanael's claim sets up a question to be contemplated as the rest of the Gospel is heard: why is Jesus called king?

The next reference to kingship in the Gospel, however, might be thought to cast doubt on whether Jesus really should be regarded as a king. In Jn 6.15, the people are 'about to come and seize him that they might make [him] king'¹⁴ so Jesus 'withdraws again to the mountain alone'. Does Jesus withdraw because he is not a king and has no desire to become one? Meeks rejects this reading, saying, 'Jesus' flight cannot imply a rejection of the term "king" as such ... What is rejected is worldly force and the world's "hour" which is not yet his own.'¹⁵ Indeed, one who is king should refuse to be *made* a king. To confess Jesus as king, as Nathanael did, occasions neither correction nor flight, but the giving of further information; to try to make Jesus a king by force is sharply differentiated from Nathanael's confession, and is thus rejected as an appropriate response. In the next pericope (6.16-20), the reader will see that, as Heath puts it, 'Jesus does not decline to

13. Jn 1.49; 6.15; 12.13, 15; 18.33, 37 (twice), 39; 19.3, 12, 14, 15 (twice), 19 and 21 (twice).

14. Ποιήσωσιν. The variant reading of ἀναδεικνύναι found in Sinaiticus is to be rejected as 'a theological correction by a copyist who correctly understood that Jesus was a king in John and who was therefore affronted by the suggestion that men could make him king' (Meeks, *Prophet King*, p. 88).

15. Meeks, *Prophet King*, p. 89.

demonstrate his sovereignty, but he does reject its establishment by human hands’;¹⁶ rather, he walks on water and says *Ἐγώ εἰμι* (6.20). As Hunt has recently pointed out, the refusal of a title was a common practice among Roman rulers, documenting references to such *recusatio* by nine of the fifteen emperors from Augustus to Antoninus Pius.¹⁷

What then does Jesus do that leads the crowd to see a potential king in him, even if they miss his actual kingship? 6.15 follows directly after the feeding of the multitude and the crowd is the one which has just been fed. The provision of food was a royal function in various ancient Near Eastern contexts¹⁸ and specifically Roman examples of monarchs (or would-be monarchs) engaging in large scale feedings include the Gracchi and Julius Caesar.¹⁹ The introduction of kingship here is integrated into the narrative. Jesus is doing kingly things, and characters (even if unreliable ones) name this for the reader. The characterization of Jesus as king becomes harder for a reader to avoid. The idea that Jesus’ deeds reveal kingship may have been prepared for in 3.2-5, when Nicodemus asks a question about Jesus’ signs, and Jesus responds by speaking about the kingdom of God.²⁰ The Good Shepherd

16. Jane Heath, ‘You Say that I Am a King (John 18.37)’, *JSNT* 34 (2012), pp. 232-52 (241).

17. Hunt, *Jesus Caesar*, pp. 144-49. See also Jean Béranger, *Recherches sur l’aspect idéologique du principat* (Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft, 6; Basel: Reinhardt, 1953).

18. Nathan MacDonald, ‘“The Eyes of All Look to You”: The Generosity of the Divine King’, in Nathan MacDonald, Kathy Ehrensperger and Luzia Sutter Rehmann (eds.), *Decisive Meals: Table Politics in Biblical Literature* (LNTS, 449; London: T. & T. Clark, 1988), pp. 1-14.

19. On which, see Angela Standhartinger, ‘“And All Ate and Were Filled” (Mark 6.42 par.): The Feeding Narratives in the Context of Hellenistic-Roman Banquet Culture’, in Nathan MacDonald, Kathy Ehrensperger and Luzia Sutter Rehmann (eds.), *Decisive Meals: Table Politics in Biblical Literature* (LNTS, 449; London: T. & T. Clark, 1988), pp. 62-83.

20. This is the only passage in John’s Gospel to refer explicitly to the Kingdom of God rather than Jesus. As Lori Baron has persuasively argued (*The Shema in John’s Gospel Against its Backgrounds in Second Temple Judaism* [PhD Dissertation; Durham, NC: Duke University, 2015]), the Fourth Gospel presents a unity of father and son (e.g. Jn 10.30) that locates Jesus within the unity proclaimed by the Shema, a pre-text whose importance for John, she argues, has been greatly underestimated. While Son and Father are not the same person (Jesus is actually praying, for instance in ch. 17, and not play-acting prayer by talking to himself), the

discourse may reinforce this association for a reader who sees the royal allusions here.

The next explicit reference to Jesus as king comes, as in ch. 6, from the lips of a crowd. As Jesus enters Jerusalem, the crowd echoes Nathanael in acclaiming him ‘King of Israel’ (Jn 12.13). These twin acclamations form an *inclusio* around Jesus’ pre-Passion ministry, highlighting their importance. To further emphasize the point, and add the narrator’s approval to the crowd’s claim, a paraphrase of Zech. 9.9 is then added which preserves the term ‘king’, now applied to Jesus, even though much of the rest of the verse is elided.²¹ Like the example in ch. 6, this kingship acclamation has been prepared for by the immediately preceding pericope. David Svärd has argued that in Jn 12.1-8, we have a private anointing by a prophet, modeled after Samuel’s anointing of David in 1 Samuel 16, with the explicit naming of kingship as the office which the anointing confers being delayed (again, as in ch. 6) to the following pericope.²²

The reader will only rarely have seen explicit mention of Jesus’ kingship in the pre-Passion ministry. In the trial scene and crucifixion narrative, however, she will encounter more frequent use of kingship language relating to Jesus. This contrast may be a less stark version of the pattern we find in Mark’s Gospel where ‘Jesus is never called a “king” until he stands before Pilate on the way to the cross; yet from that point forward, within the space of thirty verses, he is called “king” six times.’²³ In John, too, it is Pilate who introduces the language of kingship into the trial scene in 18.33. Jesus asks whether Pilate asks his question ‘on your own (ἀπὸ σεαυτοῦ)’ (18.34), a prepositional phrase which, as Meeks argues, ‘elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel ... points to the divine origin of revelation through one who, consciously or

union is sufficient for talk of God’s kingdom to be entirely compatible with a presentation of Jesus as king.

21. Only nine of LXX Zech. 9.9’s twenty-five words are reproduced, and three words are added.

22. David Svärd, ‘John 12:1-8 as a Royal Anointing Scene’, in Kasper Bro Larsen (ed.), *The Gospel of John as a Genre Mosaic* (SANT, 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), pp. 249-68.

23. Joel Marcus, ‘Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation’, *JBL* 125 (2006), pp. 73-87 (73).

unconsciously, is a prophet'.²⁴ Jesus' kingship is again authoritatively confirmed.

Jesus describes his kingdom as 'not of (ἐκ) this world' (Jn 18.36), denying the source while conceding the point in question: he is a king.²⁵ In the next verse, Jesus states, 'you say that I am a king' (βασιλεύς εἰμι ἐγώ).²⁶ Heath argues that this statement is '[yoked] with εἰμι ἐγώ; John evokes the prominence and theological profundity of Jesus' earlier pronouncements of ἐγώ εἰμι.'²⁷ The reversed word order may signal the finality of this self-identification, both chronologically and conceptually.

If Jesus' being seated upon the judgment seat could perhaps be understood as a kind of enthronement during the trial, his crucifixion removes any doubt.²⁸ He has just endured a mock coronation (Jn 19.1-5), culminating in the announcement ('Behold the man!') that Hunt has compared to Anchises's prophetic announcement of Augustus in the *Aeneid*,²⁹ and received a *titulus*, inscribed on Pilate's own authority, proclaiming him king (Jn 19.19-22). As Joel Marcus has argued, crucifixion itself served as an "exalting" mode of execution [which] was designed to mimic, parody, and puncture the pretensions of insubordinate transgressors by displaying a deliberately horrible mirror of their self-elevation'.³⁰ Jesus' crucifixion shows that those hostile to him were as aware as Nathanael the 'true Israelite' and the exultant crowds

24. Meeks, *Prophet King*, p. 63.

25. See Meeks, *Prophet King*, pp. 63-64; Richey, *Roman Imperial Ideology*, pp. 157-66.

26. The punctuation here differs from NA²⁸, which assigns the pronoun to the beginning of the next sentence. Heath has pointed out, however, that not only is the proposed punctuation grammatically possible, but that it matches the citation practice of many Latin fathers who either cite the whole verse with a double ἐγώ or cite the first half with the ἐγώ. Cf. Heath, 'You Say that I Am a King', pp. 232-39.

27. Heath, 'You Say that I Am a King', p. 249.

28. This reading relies on taking ἐκάθισεν (Jn 19.13) as a transitive verb rather than reflexive. See Jey Kanagaraj, 'Jesus the King, Merkabah Mysticism and the Gospel of John', *TynBul* 47 (1996), pp. 349-66 (363-65).

29. Virgil, *Aen.* 6.791. See Hunt, *Jesus Caesar*, pp. 211-46.

30. Marcus, 'Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation', p. 78. On Jesus' display of honor as others try to bring him shame, see Jerome Neyrey, 'Despising the Shame of the Cross: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative', *Semeia* 69 (1996), pp. 113-37.

that Jesus was acting in a regal fashion. What separated them was the question of whether or not this regality was appropriate.

Other Aspects of the Gospel that Cohere with Royal Christology

In the previous section, it was established that the constructed reader would in fact encounter claims of Jesus' kingship critically punctuating John's Gospel. But could the presentation of Jesus in this Gospel be understood as coherent with Greco-Roman kingship discourse? Would Jesus look like a king in more than a handful of pericopes? Do other Johannine images for Jesus compete with 'king' for dominance, making it easier for a reader to cling to these images and forget the royal imagery? In this section I will argue that, in addition to the aspects of Jesus' characterization that are named as kingly for the reader, much of the rest of the characterization could be understood as conforming to Greco-Roman royal scripts.

In what follows, I will draw upon Roman imperial discourse along with other sources of comparison. It might be objected that this discourse should not be taken as an instance of kingship discourse because of Roman denials that their emperors were kings. This denial was mainly a Latin phenomenon, however. In Greek texts the word βασιλεύς could freely be used to designate the Roman emperor, from Augustus onward.³¹ Given that our constructed reader is encountering John's Gospel in Greek, this Greek usage could help form connections between John's presentation of Jesus and the reader's conception of emperors. Even in regards to Latin, Malcolm Schofield's study of Seneca's writings to Nero is helpful to justify understanding Roman Imperial Latin texts as a relevant part of kingship discourse. Schofield analyzes Seneca's alternation between the terms *princeps* ('prince') and *rex* ('king'), and observes that the Stoic advisor mixes the two sufficiently that synonymy must be assumed, even though he avoids explicitly referring to Nero as a *rex* as a concession to 'the unpopular associations traditionally carried by the word'.³² Thus, Seneca, an

31. See Harry Sidebottom, 'Roman Imperialism: The Changed Outward Trajectory of the Roman Empire', *Historia* 54 (2005), pp. 315-30 (esp. list of examples on p. 328 n. 87).

32. Malcolm Schofield, 'Seneca on Monarchy and the Political Life: *De Clementia*, *De Tranquillitate Animi*, *De Otio*', in Shadi Bartsch and Alessandro

important Roman political actor and thinker, describes an emperor as a *princeps* and treats this term as synonymous with *rex*. For readers living under the rule of a Roman emperor accustomed to the kind of discourse to which Seneca witnesses, presentations of the emperor could well help form their image of kingship.

One aspect of Jesus' work in John's Gospel that could reinforce his depiction as a king is his giving of law. Later reception, such as Lucian's *Peregrinus*, will describe Jesus as a law-giver.³³ In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus both keeps his Father's commandments (Jn 15.10) and gives a new commandment (13.34; 15.12). To give law was required of founding rulers, but also expected of reformers, who give 'new' commandments to groups that already have law. Cicero praises Minos, Lycurgus and Theseus for giving law to new communities but also praises Draco, Solon and Clisthenes who were not founders but reformers of Athens. He reserves his greatest praise, characteristically, for the Roman constitution which 'was based upon the genius, not of one man, but of many', working in succession, each giving new commands.³⁴ As well as law, Jesus brings peace (Jn 14.27). While, as Bultmann put it, the gift is not of 'continuing prosperity' but of 'eschatological salvation', Jesus' gift of peace increases his resemblance to Augustus's own self-presentation in his *Res Gestae*.³⁵

Another important 'garb' in which John dresses his protagonist is that of healer. That too was an image readily subsumed into kingship in Roman political thought. Aristides speaks of Roman rule as a whole as bringing the sick world to a state of health.³⁶ Philo talks metaphorically of good leaders in terms of their healing effects, both Roman and

Schiesaro (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Seneca* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 68-81 (70).

33. Lucian, *Peregr.* 13.

34. Cicero, *Rep.* 2.1.2. See discussion in Daniel Kapust, 'Cicero on *Decorum* and the Morality of Rhetoric', *European Journal of Political Theory* 10 (2011), pp. 92-113.

35. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), p. 627. Augustus talks of all the arenas in which he has brought peace in paragraphs 12, 13, 25 and 26.

36. See citation of Aristides's *Roman Oration*, 98 in Warren Carter, "'The Blind, Lame and Paralyzed'" (John 5:3): John's Gospel, Disability Studies, and Postcolonial Perspectives', in Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper (eds.), *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2011), pp. 129-50 (134).

Jewish (the latter in the case of Joseph's public service in Egypt).³⁷ The notion of physical health is not entirely absent in the Augustan title 'Savior (σωτήρ) of the World', which is applied in Jesus in Jn 4.42.³⁸ According to Suetonius, Vespasian once actually cured a blind man.³⁹

John also has Jesus use paternal language in often referring to his disciples as 'little children'. This too could be understood as a way of reinforcing the claim of kingship, rather than competing with it. Cicero compares founding a people to raising a child from infancy to maturity,⁴⁰ and Livy talks of Brutus, the founder of 'free' Rome, being mourned 'as a father'.⁴¹ Of course, not every fictive father or healer can be read as a king; the point is that these images need not detract from the kingship imagery but could even reinforce it.

Louis Feldman, in his study of Josephus's reception of Hellenistic kingship ideology, has helpfully distilled for us the virtues a king should display.⁴² First, he should have a noble birth. John omits any birth narrative (perhaps because he can't contradict existing birth traditions so blatantly), but instead opens his work with Jesus' pre-cosmic origins and closeness to a divine Father.⁴³ The title 'Son of God' was also an imperial title, starting with Augustus.⁴⁴ Secondly, a king should be wise, and John's portrayal of Jesus is often recognized as in fact presenting him as Wisdom herself.⁴⁵ Thirdly, a king should be courageous and Jesus not only returns to Judea despite the fact that the people there had recently tried to stone him (Jn 11.7-8), but also walks

37. See discussion in Per Jarle Bekken, *The Lawsuit Motif in John's Gospel from New Perspectives: Jesus Christ, Crucified Criminal and Emperor of the World* (NovTSup, 158; Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 185-86.

38. See discussion in Richey, *Roman Imperial Ideology*, pp. 82-91.

39. Suetonius, *Vesp.* 7.2-3.

40. Cicero, *Rep.* 2.11.21.

41. Livy, *Hist.* 2.7.

42. Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 129-31.

43. I am grateful to Mark Goodacre who pointed out to me that Jn 7.42 suggests that John is in fact presupposing his readers' awareness of other infancy narratives.

44. See Richey, *Roman Imperial Ideology*, pp. 91-103; Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in its Social and Political Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

45. This claim is the driving conviction behind the title and argument of Ben Witherington, III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

towards his arresting party with full knowledge of what is about to happen to him (18.4). Fourthly, a king should be temperate, and Jesus famously neither eats nor drinks at all in the Gospel, except to take some sour wine on the cross. Fifthly, a king should practice justice, and Jesus differentiates himself from his Jewish opponents in Jn 7.24 by charging them to judge according to ‘justice’ (*δικαίαν*), a charge which signals a conviction that he is already judging this way. Included in justice is the practice of gratitude, and John characterizes Jesus’ feeding miracle in ch. 6 by saying, ‘they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks (*εὐχαριστήσαντος*)’ (Jn 6.23), highlighting the thanksgiving by using it as a metonymy for all of Jesus’ actions at that event. Finally, a king should practice piety, which Jesus shows to God in his frequent prayers and to his mother from the cross (Jn 19.26-27).

A constant in John’s presentation of Jesus is that he is dutiful, obedient and even servile. As Attridge puts it, ‘he does what he is told ... there are sheep that he “must” gather.’⁴⁶ He demonstrates servitude by washing feet. Is this a counter-image to kingship which could relativize it and even render it quite marginal? In fact, even during the Principate, Roman authors continued to speak of emperors using this kind of language. In Seneca’s *De Clementia*, framed as a missive to Nero (and probably read by him, though with eaves-droppers envisaged from the beginning), Seneca analogizes the restrictions on a king’s freedom to those on God’s; both sacrifice freedom so that their subjects may have it, consenting to the slavery of being supremely great for ‘supreme command means noble slavery’.⁴⁷ In the political thought of the Principate, being servile and regal are not contradictory, but intimately connected. When Jesus commands his followers to act as each other’s servants in Jn 13.14, he is (even if unwittingly), echoing Cicero’s counsel that we ‘are not born for ourselves alone, but our country claims a share of our being, and our friends a share.’⁴⁸

46. Harold W. Attridge, ‘An “Emotional” Jesus and the Stoic Tradition’, in Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Ismo Dunderberg (eds.), *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), pp. 77-92 (80).

47. Seneca, *Clem.* 7.4-81. Schofield points out a variant in the manuscript tradition where *nobilem* is replaced by *nobis*, giving us the even more striking ‘*Imperium* is for us, servitude for you’. Schofield, ‘Seneca on Monarchy and the Political Life’, p. 72 n. 14.

48. Cicero, *Off.* 1.7.22.

Many have thought that the central defining image of Jesus in John's Gospel is that of the enigmatic divine intermediary who only reveals that he is the revealer.⁴⁹ Roman political thought was very comfortable describing kings as divine intermediaries too. Speaking of public office in general, Cicero tells us that in 'no other occupation [does] human virtue approach more closely the august function of the gods'.⁵⁰ Seneca suggests that Nero sustain the analogy 'the king is to the citizens what gods are to the king' when he writes of the gods that 'I can do no better than to make them a model for the prince: he should wish to be to the citizens as he would wish the gods to be to him.'⁵¹ Suggestively, Bekken can write of 'the commonplace idea in Hellenistic and Roman kingship ideology that the king or Emperor embodied the Logos of God'.⁵² To be a divine intermediary is, in other words, perfectly compatible with kingship, and can reinforce regal imagery.

As befits one who descended from heaven, Jesus is often perceived by characters in the Fourth Gospel as foreign. It is obvious to the Samaritan woman that Jesus is Jewish (Jn 4.9), yet some Jews think he is Samaritan (8.48), and his opponents complain that they do not know where he is from (9.29). As Jesus' foreignness is repeatedly pointed out, a Roman reader may start to form connections with certain myths concerning Rome's founding by Aeneas, the Trojan.⁵³ In Sallust's telling of the myth, he explains how Rome was 'at the outset founded and inhabited by Trojans ... under the leadership [*duce*] of Aeneas; their co-founders were the Aborigines,' and 'After these two different peoples ... came together within the same walls, it is unbelievable how easily they merged.'⁵⁴ Jesus, like Aeneas, is a foreign leader who unites two peoples into one community.

Feldman writes that 'the loving care that Aeneas showed for his father, Anchises'⁵⁵ became a *locus classicus* for envisaging the virtue

49. For instance, see Wayne A. Meeks, 'The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism', *JBL* 91 (1972), pp. 44-72.

50. Cicero, *Rep.* 1.7.12.

51. Seneca, *Clem.* 7.1.

52. Bekken, *Lawsuit Motif in John's Gospel*, p. 203.

53. It is true that Aeneas was not regarded as a king of Rome, but he was employed as a model by many emperors of the Principate. According to Cicero, Rome did have at least one good foreign king: Numa Pompilius (*Rep.* 2.13.25).

54. Sallust, *Bell. Cat.* 6.1-2.

55. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 128.

of *pietas*. After the battle of Pharsallus, Julius Caesar started claiming descent from Aeneas ‘to create an image of legitimacy for his rule’ and ‘link Aeneas’s piety with his own’.⁵⁶ In his *De Bello Civile*, Caesar is happy to lampoon his Pompeian opponents as foreign, but he will also seek to establish the legitimacy of his problematically innovative and monarchic rule by allying himself with the foreign founder Aeneas.⁵⁷ Some of his coins promoted this association by depicting Aeneas leaving Troy nude, carrying nothing except his father and his gods,⁵⁸ demonstrating piety in familial and religious spheres. The emperor Augustus continued to use Aeneas as a legitimating figure as the Principate began, by performing this scene with himself in Aeneas’s place, receiving Vesta (the goddess Aeneas was carrying) into his home, much to Ovid’s apparent delight.⁵⁹ Could a reader imagine Jesus performing this scene in John’s Gospel? Perhaps one might look to Jn 19.25-27. Here, like Aeneas on Caesar’s coins, Jesus is nude,⁶⁰ in a place of violence, demonstrating filial piety (this time to his mother rather than father) and pious devotion to God. If we accept Bultmann’s reading that the giving of the beloved disciple and the mother of Jesus to each other represents the union of the Jew and Gentile in the church, he is also here effecting the unity of two separate peoples, a deed which was characteristic of Aeneas for Sallust.⁶¹

56. Jane D. Evans, *The Art of Persuasion: Political Propaganda from Aeneas to Brutus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 42.

57. On this point, see Ayelet Peer, *Caesar’s Bellum Civile and the Composition of a New Reality* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2015). Peer observes that ‘most of the key Pompeians in *B.C. II* are foreigners’ (p. 97) and the ‘African victory was not Pompeian but barbarian’ (p. 107). Once ‘we’ actually ‘see’ Pompey’s camp in the third book (3.96), we observe it full of ‘hedonistic Oriental’ *luxuria* (p. 140).

58. This is not the only image of this scene the Roman imagination would contemplate, as can be seen from the close of Book 2 of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, in which a (presumably clothed) Aeneas carries his father but insists that Anchises carry the holy objects as Aeneas himself has been made impure by bloodshed.

59. Ovid, *Fast.* 4.949-54. I am grateful to Jed Atkins for sharing with me a draft chapter on ‘Civil Religion’ from his recent book on Roman political thought in which this point is discussed (*Roman Political Thought* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018]).

60. For Jesus’ likely nudity on the cross in the picture John paints, see the argument in Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI* (AB, 29a; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), p. 902.

61. Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, p. 484.

Finally, one might ask, if we are to think of Jesus as a king, what is he king *of*? Can his band of disciples be considered a kingdom he is founding? Cicero famously defines a *res publica* ('republic', 'commonwealth' or 'state', of which a kingdom is a special case) as the *res* of a *populus*, where a *populus* is 'not any collection of human beings brought together in any sort of way, but an assemblage of people in large numbers associated in an agreement with respect to justice (*iuris consensu*) and a partnership for the common good'.⁶² As has already been noted, δίκαιος ('just') characterizes Jesus' judgments as distinct from those of his Jewish opponents. Cicero himself would say that the foundation of justice is *fides*,⁶³ and 'faith' (πίστις) is certainly an important concept for John who, despite not using the noun, uses the verb πιστεύω ninety-eight times—more than all three Synoptics plus the Pauline Epistles combined.

Augustine, reading the definition from Cicero's *de Republica*, would later argue that not only does the *multitudo* of Christ followers satisfy this definition, but that it is in fact its only exemplar, for 'true justice does not exist except in that republic whose founder and ruler is Christ'.⁶⁴ Clement of Alexandria presents a somewhat similar view as a piece of common ground between Christians and Stoics, claiming that 'the Stoics say that heaven is in the proper sense a city, but that those [cities] here on earth are not ... for a city or a people is something morally good'.⁶⁵ If Jesus is understood as founding the terrestrial colony of the heavenly city, this view is relevant. Of course, both views are much later than John's Gospel (though the putative Stoic precedent may not be). A more ancient analogy might be supplied by the Roman ascription of the term *alter populus* (second nation) to the participants in the Bacchic cult in the late second century BCE.⁶⁶ This designation

62. Cicero, *Rep.* 1.25.39. See discussion in Malcolm Schofield, 'Cicero's Definition of *Res Publica*', in Malcolm Schofield (ed.), *Saving the City: Philosopher-Kings and Other Classical Paradigms* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 178-94.

63. Cicero, *Off.* 1.7.23.

64. Augustine, *Civ.* 2.21.

65. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 4.26. Cited in Peter Garnsey, *Thinking about Property: From Antiquity to the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 132. He argues that such a view does indeed have a basis in the thought of the Cynic Diogenes, a Stoic hero.

66. This is narrated in Book 39 of Livy's *History*. See discussion in John North, 'Religious Toleration in the Republic', in C. Ando (ed.), *Roman Religion*

marked the group as practicing deviant piety, improperly disconnected from Republican mores, and warranted its suppression. If Romans could see the Bacchanalia as a second nation, it might be natural to see the Christ-followers as comprising one too.

First Problem with Kingship: Lack of Freedom

In the previous two sections, I have shown that readers could find kingship in John's presentation of Jesus in both explicit and implicit ways, and that this presentation contained strong resonances with Greco-Roman political discourse. This resonance would make perfect sense as an apologetic or missionary strategy if those within the confines of the Empire were waiting for a better king whom they might follow, but in this and the next section it will be shown that such waiting was not in fact the case. Jesus' kingship (however virtuous he might be) might actually be quite the embarrassment to an evangelist using John's text.

In this section I will consider two related objections to kingship that Quentin Skinner has distilled from Tacitus (who wrote during the Principate) and his Republican predecessor Sallust.⁶⁷ An objection finding classical expression in Polybius and repeated by Cicero will exercise us more in the next section. Skinner's first objection is that when 'living in dependence on the goodwill of an arbitrary prince', one must keep one's talent or virtue hidden so as not to arouse the jealousy of the monarch, a practice which has a long-term atrophying impact on a nation's virtue.⁶⁸ Secondly, when 'required to offer counsel and advice, you will find yourself constrained to agree with whatever he says, to endorse whatever policies he already wishes to pursue'.⁶⁹ Again, as well as the personal loss of freedom to speak freely, the state suffers in the long term from a lack of good counsel.

The classical solution to these problems with an arbitrary prince is the imposition of checks and balances, as the mixed constitution of the Republic was meant to ensure, and which those Republican institutions

(Edinburgh Readings on the Ancient World; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp. 199-219.

67. Quentin Skinner, 'A Third Concept of Liberty', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 117 (2002), pp. 237-68.

68. Skinner, 'Third Concept', p. 258.

69. Skinner, 'Third Concept', p. 259.

which vestigially perdured in the Principate at least gave lip service to. A reader may be able to find another solution in John's Gospel: fearlessness. First, Jesus models for his flock the dangerous display of excellence even when he knows full well that this will lead to hostility from authorities. He raises Lazarus, despite the fact that this cements the plan to kill him (Jn 12.10). In the trial with Pilate, Pilate becomes incensed that Jesus will not even answer him, presumably not because he was so enjoying their colloquy, but because he is so used to people over whom he has the power of life and death doing precisely what worried Tacitus: saying whatever it would please him to hear (19.10). At the last supper, Jesus promises that his followers will do greater things than him (14.12). The fearlessness with which Jesus acts (and which he promises to his disciples) diffuses the worry that any kind of kingship, even his, will inhibit their virtue and frank counsel.

Of course, during the trial, Peter quite signally fails to exercise this fearlessness, denying Jesus three times (Jn 18.17, 25, 27).⁷⁰ This failure, however, is a pre-Easter failing, before Jesus' donation of the Spirit. That Peter is not only still included in the community after this failure, but three times commissioned as 'chief under-shepherd' (Jn 21.15-17), points to another quality of Jesus' which could diffuse the worries Skinner identifies: a superlative *clementia*. It is true that clemency was held up by many Greco-Roman authors as an important virtue for leaders, even if it doesn't make Feldman's list above. However, when Seneca, for instance, counsels Nero to be clement, he is trying to deter him from '[slaughtering] multitudes indiscriminately'.⁷¹ Not only is Peter not punished for his denial (or for his contradiction of Jesus in Jn 13.8, where he demonstrates the right kind of frankness of speech, even if his refusal to be washed is foolish), but Peter is rebuked for his attack on Malchus (Jn 18.10-11), and Judas is included in the inner circle of disciples despite Jesus' knowledge that Judas will betray him. It is true that Cicero approves of the Roman practice of admitting even enemies to citizenship to enlarge Rome, but this refers to conquered enemies, not people whom you know are about to hand you over to death.⁷²

70. That his inquisitor is a woman may be a further mark of Peter's shame.

71. Seneca, *Clem.* 1.26.5. Of course, Seneca ultimately failed to persuade Nero to meet even this lowest of bars.

72. Cicero, *Balb.* 13.31.

Jesus' impending betrayal by Judas is not a matter of indifference to him. As Buch-Hansen puts it, 'When the betrayal by one of his own disciples draws near, Jesus is repeatedly seized by emotional upheavals.'⁷³ But Jesus still washes Judas's feet (Jn 13.5), practices table fellowship with him (13.26) and bids him hurry to complete the betrayal (13.27).⁷⁴ Such a practice of *clementia*—counseling non-violence towards the servant of an adversarial party and even encouraging an intimate companion to fatally betray you—goes far beyond the Greco-Roman conception of the virtue so as to become vicious, a dereliction in the manly duty to defend oneself.⁷⁵ Jesus' combination of fearlessness in the face of others' authority and a recklessly 'perverted' *clementia* in the exercise of his own together form a new way of being kingly, a way which could be used directly to assuage the worries that Skinner identifies.

Of course, many Roman readers would be so horrified at this perversion of *clementia* that this new way would form a stumbling block to any desire to follow this Jesus. But, for those who were prepared to accept this offense, they might find their worries about living under the rule of a king assuaged. The notion that good kingship is precarious, and unlikely to survive succession, is the next worry to which we turn.

Second Problem with Kingship: Succession

In the previous section, I suggested that Jesus' kingship, while corresponding in many ways to a Greco-Roman vision of kingship, enlarged and transformed two of its virtues in a way that could be used to deflate some of the potential objections to living under even a good king. However, a classical objection to kingship is that succession will, in the long term, lead to decline. First, I will describe Polybius's version

73. Gitte Buch-Hansen, 'The Emotional Jesus: Anti-Stoicism and the Fourth Gospel', in Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Ismo Dunderberg (eds.), *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), pp. 93-113 (93).

74. It is technically consistent with the text that the ἤρξατο in 13.5 may mean that Jesus never finished washing the disciples' feet, and never got to Judas. There is nothing in the text, however, to signal this omission.

75. See the discussion in Brittany Wilson, *Unmanly Men: Refigurations of Masculinity in Luke-Acts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 58-64.

of this objection and Cicero's critical transmission of it. Then, I offer a solution which a reader could generate on the basis of data in John's Gospel: there is to be no succession in Jesus' kingdom; in other words, 'long lives the king'.

While Polybius, the third-to-second-century BCE Greek historian of Rome, predates John's Gospel by a substantial amount of time, he was known by later authors such as Josephus (as noted above). Cicero likewise regards his excursus on political theory in Book 6 of Polybius's *History* as such a classic that in Cicero's dialogue *de Republica*, he whets his audience's appetite for Scipio's master class on statesmanship by having Laelius excitedly recall one of Scipio's greatest qualifications to pronounce on this subject: he knew Polybius personally.⁷⁶

Polybius begins his account by defining kingship as one-man rule which is 'voluntarily accepted' by subjects who are 'governed ... by an appeal to reason'.⁷⁷ Polybius then gives a general account of the origins of kingship. His ability to generalize is grounded in the belief that floods and other natural disasters have 'many times' pushed reset on civilization.⁷⁸ Following these disasters, people naturally form herds with their own kind out of weakness, and whoever has the most strength and courage will rule. The result is monarchy that has the potential to become kingship once the notions of goodness and justice are born. The idea of justice is formed by encountering the counter-image of people failing to practice filial piety or gratitude to a benefactor. Honor is a generalization of the respect given to one who acts courageously in the face of danger.⁷⁹ Both of these ideas of virtues arise through the experience of strife—either the internal strife of vice or virtuous response to external strife.

With kingship defined and its origins theorized, Polybius turns to its decline. For Polybius, this decline is assured (even if its timing may vary), for kingship (like all pure constitutions) '[engenders] vice'.⁸⁰ Early kings are kept busy with building projects to ensure the security and nourishment of future citizens. They have no opportunity for luxury but live much like those they govern. However, the later kings,

76. Cicero, *Rep.* 1.21.34.

77. Polybius, *Hist.* 6.4.1.

78. Polybius, *Hist.* 6.5.5.

79. Polybius, *Hist.* 6.6.1-9.

80. Polybius, *Hist.* 6.10.4.

especially if they receive the office through hereditary succession, do not have the experiences of scarcity, danger and hardship that caused their ancestors to come together and taught them what virtue is. Instead, they enjoy the unearned abundance their predecessors secured, and are corrupted by luxurious dress, food and eroticism.⁸¹ For Polybius, second-hand knowledge is no kind of knowledge at all; without the formative experience of adversity, these later kings are both vicious and useless. Once a monarchic state becomes successful, the governed as well develop vice. For when one's needs are met, obscurity (i.e. not holding any office) constitutes shame (τὸ τῆς ἀδοξίας ὄνειδος).⁸² This shame enflames their passions and destroys their virtue of self-control. So, monarchy inevitably destroys itself as its engines of success produce the pollution of vice, both in governed and governor. The result is essential instability and unrest. This notion of the corrupting effects of luxury was well-received by many Roman thinkers, such as Sallust who wrote of the need for enduring fear of an external enemy to avoid the corruption of a state.⁸³

When Cicero summarizes Polybius's ideas in his *de Republica*,⁸⁴ he is one of the first to suggest that there are 'fixes' available to the flaws Polybius identified. After the death of Romulus, the 'leading men' (*principes*) came up with an 'entirely new' idea: *interregnum*. They reject royal ancestry as a criterion for selecting successors.⁸⁵ The chronology should be noted: this plan was not devised as a response to Polybius naming for them a flaw in the kingship practices of surrounding peoples. By a matter of centuries, the early Romans had already solved that problem before Polybius even noticed it. Polybius's general, theoretical account pays insufficient regard to Rome's particular brilliance and so its analysis falters and Cicero can provide his properly Roman corrective. Cicero will ultimately reach the same

81. Polybius, *Hist.* 6.7.4-7.

82. Polybius, *Hist.* 6.57.6.

83. His comments on the corrupting effects of 'luxury and greed' in his *Hist.* 1.16, were approvingly cited by Augustine, *Civ.* 2.19. See discussion in Daniel Kapust, *Republicanism, Rhetoric, and Roman Political Thought: Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 53-80.

84. See Jed Atkins, *Cicero on Politics and the Limits of Reason* (Cambridge Classical Studies; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. pp. 80-119. I am grateful to Jed Atkins for providing feedback on my comparative study of Polybius and Cicero.

85. Cicero, *Rep.* 2.12.23-24.

conclusion as Polybius (that the mixed constitution provides the best corrective to the flaws of monarchy), but he will depart from Polybius by arguing that the problem with kingship for Rome was not a generalizable account, but particular and in fact individual: Tarquinius Superbus. Romans should be impressed at their Roman ancestors' ingenuity at coming up with the very best form of kingship imaginable, which evades all mechanically sure paths of decline. However, while it can avoid engendering vice, it cannot insulate itself from the possibility of a vicious king. General rules are not what sank Roman kingship; Tarquin is. Republicanism, for Cicero, is the trustworthy alternative.

A reader of John's Gospel may be able to construct another solution, better than Cicero's, to the problem of succession rather than simply diminishing it: eliminate succession and have one king reign forever. In Jn 14.18, Jesus promises his disciples, 'I will not leave you orphans [ὀρφανούς]; I am coming to you.' While the parallels to images used to describe the abandonment of pupils by a teacher in rabbinic literature (such as *ARN* 25A) and in Plato (such as *Phaed.* 116a) are often noted, the potential to read this wording as political in nature is often missed. Cicero describes the loss of a king as orphaning.⁸⁶ In Roman family law, a child who was orphaned would have a *tutor* (guardian) assigned.⁸⁷ In another place, Cicero analogizes civic governance with this office: 'As with the office of guardian (*tutela*), so the management of the *res publica* should be conducted in the interests of those who are entrusted with one's care.'⁸⁸ Succession is described using a metaphor whose source domain is family law. In his last supper discourse, Jesus denies that the situation which would engender the need for a *tutor* will ever occur. His kingdom is fundamentally different from those that Cicero considered; there will not be succession to a *tutor*, as he will never leave his people as orphans.

86. For instance, see Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, p. 618 n. 1, who concludes that it is 'only a picture'. Cicero, *Rep.* 1.41.64.

87. A helpful brief summary of *tutela* law in our period may be found in Gottfried Schieman and Markus Sehlmeier, 'Tutela', in Hubert Cancik *et al.* (eds.), *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World: Antiquity*. XV (Leiden: Brill, 2010), s.v.

88. Cicero, *Off.* 1.85, cited in Schofield, 'Cicero's Definition', p. 192. See also discussion on p. 193 of how this notion contrasts with Plato's 'guards' (φύλακες) of a city.

This claim is not isolated to Jn 14.12 (even if the image is), but finds confirmation in Louis Martyn's exegesis of John 9, where he takes the reference in 9.4 to the continuation of Jesus' works ('*We* have to do the works of the one who sent me') as 'activity of the Risen Lord in the deeds of Christian witnesses'.⁸⁹ Jesus remains continually present and active, which is to say regnant, through the Church's activity.

A potential objection should be considered here, that the Spirit is Jesus' successor. In recent work, Gates Brown has argued that in John, 'the spirit comes to be characterized as the Paraclete who makes possible continued access to Jesus after Jesus has departed'.⁹⁰ She uses the model of patron-client relations and locates the Spirit as broker subordinate to Jesus. The Spirit is, in other words, not succeeding Jesus in his reign but rather enabling its continuance. While the Spirit can be called 'another Advocate' (Jn 14.16), this represents the Spirit's continuation of a limited portion of Jesus' role during the earthly ministry, not the fullness of his kingship.

The constructed reader, a potential Christ-follower, need not worry about the effects of succession, as there will be none. If such a reader is also worried about the deleterious effects of luxury, she need not worry on that front either. As Bultmann puts it, 'The believer is continually referred forward to those moments of his life, in which the proclamation of the Crucified leads him into *λύπη* and *παραχή*, when his faith is being tested, that he is able to grasp what that faith means.'⁹¹ Continued opposition, whether from the world or from 'the Jews', ensures the constant *metus* of the external threat that Sallust saw as necessary to prevent corruption.

Jesus' Commensurably Primeval Flesh

In the preceding section, I suggested that the following bold claim could be argued from John's Gospel: that this transformed kingship will not decline, for its founding king will reign forever. While such a

89. J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 3rd edn, 2003), p. 39.

90. Tricia Gates Brown, *Spirit in the Writings of John: Johannine Pneumatology in Social-Scientific Perspective* (LNTS, 253; London: T. & T. Clark, 2003), p. 22. This book also provides a very thorough review of the scholarship on Johannine pneumatology.

91. Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, p. 473.

claim might be attractive to the most kingship-skeptical Greco-Roman political theorist, it raises the obvious question: why should one believe that such a thing is possible? The claim that Jesus will reign forever is not unique to John's Gospel within early Christian literature. But, in this final section, I argue that the Fourth Gospel contains further substantiation for such a claim in the form of what could be taken as evidence of the extravagant antiquity of Jesus.

We have seen above how Julius Caesar sought to justify his problematically innovative rule by connecting himself with the antique *exemplum* that Aeneas provided for him. This valorization of antiquity was pervasive in the Greco-Roman *Weltanschauung*. Two centuries after Caesar's time, Justin Martyr will worry that 'some may say illogically for the purpose of turning way from those things taught by us that they came to pass one hundred and fifty years ago in the time of Quirinius'.⁹² Commenting on this text, Gregory Sterling points out that this was a common concern: Plato's *Timaeus* witnesses to the embarrassment of Solon at encountering an Egyptian priest whose civilization is much older than his; Josephus claims his history spans five millennia; Berossus, a native Babylonian historian, an even more impressive one-hundred and fifty millenia!⁹³

The claim of historical pre-existence in the prologue tells us of Jesus' antiquity, but I will argue that the way John characterizes Jesus' body could show the same thing to a politically astute reader whose anthropological convictions may be similarly situated within a Greco-Roman *Weltanschauung*. Käsemann famously once asked, 'In what sense is he flesh, who walks on water and through closed doors, who cannot be captured by his enemies, who at the well of Samaria is tired and desires a drink, yet has no need of drink and has food different from that which his disciples seek?'⁹⁴ For Käsemann, this question is meant to lead his readers to scoff at the 'fleshiness' of Jesus' apparent flesh and accept his claim of John's naïve Docetism, a claim Attridge has called 'surely overblown'.⁹⁵ But, what if we actually tried to

92. Justin, *1 Apol.* 46.1. Cited in Gregory Sterling, 'Customs Which Are Not Lawful', *Leaven* 5.2 (1997), pp. 19-24 (20).

93. Sterling, 'Customs', p. 20. Cf. Plato, *Tim.* 22b; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.13; Cf. Berossus's *Babyloniaka* (FGH 680 f1).

94. Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (trans. Gerhard Krodel; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1968), p. 9.

95. Attridge, 'Emotional Jesus', p. 79 n. 13.

answer the question within the reconstructed perspective of these readers of interest? What kind of flesh is it that needs so little food, is apparently sexually inactive, but participates in its greatest revelation nude (on a cross)? The answer might be: ancient flesh.

In Lucretius's version, for instance, of the Golden Age myth,⁹⁶ the earliest humans need very little food, know no lust and wear no clothing. Later early Christian authors would find much concord between such images and their understanding of prelapsarian humanity. Gregory of Nyssa, for instance, compares the 'tunics of skin' of Gen. 3.21 with human beings being clothed with 'sexual intercourse, conception, childbirth, uncleanness, nursing, feeding, excretion, gradual growth to adulthood, prime of life, old age, illness and death'.⁹⁷ Jesus is presented as ancient in a bodily way. Not only is this antiquity valorized, but it could serve to support the notion that his reign will be eternal. While there were many explanations for aging in Greek and Roman medicine, one popularized by Galen is that eating is what causes us to age: earthy particles that do not burn properly build up and people suffer from 'insufficient digestion, which in turn leads to an accumulation of putrefying waste products'.⁹⁸ Jesus' flesh is ancient, it resists ageing and can be trusted to last forever, enabling an eternal reign.

Conclusion

This article has considered how a reader of John's Gospel whose worldview had been shaped by Greco-Roman political thought might have approached the presentation of Jesus as a king in this Gospel. Such a reader frequently confronts this claim, not just in explicit uses of the term 'king' but by a characterization which in many respects

96. Lucretius, *Nat.* 5.920-1010. See Dean Hammer, *Roman Political Thought: From Cicero to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 93-179.

97. Gregory of Nyssa, *Virg.* 12.4-13.1. Cited in Theresa Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 190. See also pp. 205-206 for similar conclusions from John Chrysostom, Basil of Ancyra, Basil of Caesarea and Evagrius.

98. Daniel Schäfer, 'More than a Fading Flame: The Physiology of Old Age between Speculative Analogy and Experimental Method', in Manfred Horstmanshoff, Helen King and Claus Zittel (eds.), *Blood, Sweat and Tears: The Changing Concept of Physiology from Antiquity into Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 241-66 (241).

coheres with how she expects kings to be presented. This would be a problem if she were to approach this Gospel not merely sympathetically, but embrace it as containing ‘words of everlasting life’ (cf. Jn 6.68), as her worldview would include a general suspicion of kingship as a form of government. However, if she were prepared to scrutinize the Gospel carefully she would find that Jesus demonstrates a fearlessness in the face of hostile authority and practices what she might view as a recklessly perverted form of clemency that could assuage her worries about kingship suppressing one’s freedom. As she worries about what kind of king might succeed Jesus, she would find data in the Gospel to support the claim that Jesus will never be succeeded.

Of course, many readers would dismiss all of these claims as ridiculous. But, for a favorably disposed reader who had her worries about kingship actualized, John provides (wittingly or not) resources that enable a reader to differentiate Jesus’ kingship sufficiently from that considered in Greco-Roman political discourse. A new Christ-follower who had drunk deeply from this well did not need to throw out wholesale all of her pre-existing political beliefs. She could encounter a king who in many ways resembles the kings she is familiar with but has overcome, not just the world, but also the theorists’ objections.