The Chronology of the Crucifixion and the Passover

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The Problem

Simply stated, the problem of the chronology of the crucifixion and the Passover meal is that whereas the Synoptic Gospels indicate that the meal was eaten on the day before the crucifixion (*cf.* Mk. 14:12–16), John appears to contradict this. Jn. 18:28 states that on the morning of the crucifixion the priests 'did not enter the praetorium, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover' (R.S.V.). Jn. 19:14 states that the day of the crucifixion was 'the day of preparation of the Passover'. Thus John seems to date the Passover meal on the evening of the crucifixion. The corollary of this difference is that whereas in the Synoptics the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples was a Passover meal, in John it was an ordinary meal, or perhaps an anticipated Passover.[1]

Redaction criticism suggests that the source material of the Gospels was put together in order to express certain theological motifs. It is therefore plausible that the differences noted above are due to insertions by redactors with different theological interests. In the case of the Synoptic accounts, the whole *pericope* of Mk. 14:12–16 is seen generally as a later addition, not basic to the passion narrative,[2] which might even be improved if it were omitted. However, the similarity of the passage with the Triumphal Entry in Mk. 11:1–6 favours the view that it was constructed by the Evangelist himself. A plausible theological motive for this was suggested by R.H. Lightfoot,[3] who points out that the Jewish Passover was regarded at that time not only as commemorative of a past event (the deliverance from Egypt), but also as containing the pledge of a great future deliverance. Mark wished to make the link between the Passover and the Last Supper explicit in order to emphasize the eschatological aspect of the Eucharist, as the pledge of future deliverance and the earnest of Jesus' coming. There is no doubt that the Eucharist was so understood in the Early Church, as I Cor. 11:26 shows: 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes'.

It may of course be that Mk. 14:12–16 is not the oldest preparation narrative, and that behind it lies an original which was not theologically shaped. H. Schürmann[4] argues that the earliest source is reflected in Lk. 22:7–13 and 15–18, but that now only the last three of these verses enshrine it. The reason for this is that Luke re-edited his original introduc-

tion, using Mark's preparation *pericope*. But this was itself based on Luke's original, which 'is probably preserved in a fairly unchanged form and without additions in Mt. 26:17–19'.[5] For example, additions derived from Mk. 11:1–7 are not found in Mt. 26:17–19, which is a 'very old oral tradition, probably in pure form. . . . This oldest report tells us that Jesus celebrated the Jewish paschal meal on the day and at the hour designated by law'.[6] There is therefore good reason to give considerable weight to the Synoptic testimony that the Passover meal was eaten on the evening before the crucifixion.

But it is not only in the Synoptics that literary surgery may be used to solve the problem. E. Bammel has suggested to the present writer that John's anachronistic chronological references (18:28; 19:14) may have been added by a later redactor. This would have been done in order to bring out the typology of Jesus as the true Paschal Lamb, slaughtered outside the city at the very moment when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple. The comparison of Jesus to the Paschal Lamb was made at an early date (*cf.* 1 Cor. 5:7) and elsewhere in this Gospel Jesus is called the 'Lamb of God' (1:29, 36). Yet it is remarkable that if the Evangelist had intended to highlight this typology of Jesus in the moment of his death, he does so only by means of two chronological allusions, without even hinting at their significance. Moreover, C.H. Dodd regards it as highly improbable that the phrase 'the Lamb of God' in John 1 refers to the Passover Lamb, and says: 'it is not very likely that the Evangelist has himself remoulded the chronology to suit this idea, especially as he gives no hint that he regarded the synchronism as significant'.[7] Indeed, only the Synoptics mention the moment of the slaughter of the lambs (Mk. 14:12; Lk. 22:7). Finally, on Jn. 18:28, the opinion of J. Delorme seems justified: it 'has nothing forced or constructed. . . . The detail here does not appear to be governed by a theology'.[8] Furthermore, there is no textual uncertainty about this verse, or about 19:14.

The case for the deliberate alteration of either the Synoptic or the Johannine chronology by a redactor wishing to make a theological point is not clearly proved. It therefore seems reasonable to attempt once again to reconcile the two accounts as they stand. Two well-known approaches to the problem may be briefly surveyed first. The 'chronology of more than one day' approach has been thoroughly worked out by A. Jaubert,[9] who maintains that Jesus celebrated the Last Supper as a Passover meal on the Tuesday of passion week, in accordance with the Jubilee solar calendar. This chronology is found in a third century document, the Syriac *Didascalia*, in which the arrest occurs on Tuesday night, but the crucifixion on Friday. The Synoptics assume a date for the Passover in accordance with the solar calendar, but have telescoped the events between the arrest and the crucifixion into a single night. John, on the other hand, follows the official lunar calendar in assuming that in that year the Passover meal was celebrated on the evening immediately after Jesus' crucifixion.

Although this theory has created widespread interest, it has not been widely accepted. Jeremias rejects it,[10] as does J. Blinzler, whose verdict is worth quoting at length:

> One who carefully examines all the pros and cons will reach the conclusion that the traditional chronology is decidedly more justified. The chronology of the three days attested by the *Didascalia* has its origin in the second century at the earliest, and is the result of the efforts made later on to derive the traditional weekly fasts on Wednesday and Friday from the passion of Our Lord. There is no doubt that both the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of St. John testify to the chronology of one day.[11]

Other theories propose differing calendrical practices which would explain the discrepancy. Billerbeck[12] reasons that at the time of Jesus the influential Sadducean Boethusian high priests wished to ensure that the day of Pentecost always fell on the first day of the week. As Pentecost was fifty days after the offering of the 'Omer gift' (Lv. 23:16), the day of this offering, which was actually the second paschal day, also had to be a Sunday. Thus the first paschal day always had to be a Sabbath, and so the Passover meal was eaten on a Friday evening. However, the Pharisees ate the Passover meal that year on a Thursday, in accordance with their calculation of the fourteenth day of the month. According to Billerbeck, the Synoptics record Jesus eating the Passover meal together with the Pharisees and most of the people, while John reflects the Saduccean practice.

But there are serious objections to this. Jeremias states: 'There is no evidence that the Passover lambs were ever slaughtered on two consecutive days in the Temple, and it seems most unlikely that such a thing ever could have happened'.[12] Confusion would have arisen if the lambs were slaughtered on different days, and it is highly unlikely that the Sadducees, who had to follow the Pharisees to secure the obedience of the people, would have slaughtered their lambs on the Pharisees' Passover.

Moreover, their suggestion that a special calendar was followed at Jerusalem by Jesus and his disciples, or by Galileans, founders on similar objections, as R.E. Brown puts it: 'The real difficulty in this explanation is that the supposed calendar which Jesus followed exists only as a scholar's hypothesis'.[14] Furthermore, as he points out, adherence to the calendar was vital in a religious society so conscious of the slightest deviation, and

> in all the Gospels there is never a hint that Christ was guilty of heterodoxy in his observance of feasts—rather he appeared in Jerusalem at the time of the official observance of Passover (Jn. 2:13), Tabernacles (Jn. 2:7) and Dedication (Jn. 10:22).

The hypothesis of different calendars thus appears to be unsatisfactory.

A more plausible explanation is offered by M. Shepherd,[15] who sug-

gests that whereas John records the true date, Mark is influenced by the practice of Diaspora Judaism, where the use of a fixed calendar as opposed to the lunar calendar employed at Jerusalem, led to an advance of one day. When writing his Gospel, Mark recalled the tradition of his own Diaspora church, that Jesus died on a Friday in a year when the Passover meal was eaten on Thursday night, whereas in fact in Jerusalem it was eaten on a Friday night. But as Shepherd himself admits, very little is known about Jewish calendar systems in the dispersion. Yet if Matthew's preparation narrative is the oldest, the Evangelist clearly knew all about Palestinian practice, and he agrees with the other Synoptics.

To summarize: no solution has yet been proposed which commands the widespread agreement of scholars. This article offers one more attempt at reconciliation, taking a different approach from the ones suggested above.

Reasons for Supporting a Harmonistic Approach

There are three strands of evidence to be considered here: the context of the problem, the evidence of the chronology reported for the whole week, and the character of the Last Supper. First of all, it should be emphasized that this problem occurs within the context of widespread chronological agreement between the two accounts.[16] The most important of these is that all four Gospels state that the crucifixion occurred on the day of Preparation (Mk. 15:42; Mt. 27:62; Lk. 22:54; Jn. 19:31, 42). Three of them state that the next day was the Sabbath (Mk. 15:42; Lk. 22:54, 56; Jn. 19:31), and all of them say that the women visited the tomb on the first day of the week (Mk. 16:1–2; Mt. 28:1; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1). Furthermore, three report that the Last Supper was eaten at night (Mk. 14:17; Mt. 26:20; Jn. 13:2, 30; *cf.* also 1 Cor. 11:23), and all four say that afterwards they repaired to the Mount of Olives (Mk. 14:26, 32; Mt. 26:30, 36; Lk. 22:39–40; Jn. 18:1), where the arrest occurred. Jesus went before the priests that night (Mk. 14:53; Mt. 26:57; Lk. 22:54; Jn. 18:12, 24), and the cock crowed as predicted (Mk. 14:72; Mt. 26:74; Lk. 22:60; Jn. 18:27). The priests took him to Pilate at early dawn (Mk. 15:1; Mt. 27:1; Lk. 23:1; Jn. 18:28), on the day on which it was customary to release a prisoner (Mk. 15:6; Mt. 27:15; Jn. 18:39).[17]

Moreover, the reported chronology of the whole week, considered briefly and uncritically, supports the view that the Evangelists were not trying to contradict one another. There is another event in passion week which may be clearly dated from both John and the Synoptics—the entry into Jerusalem. If we use P to denote the day of the Passover festival, then according to Jn. 12:1, Jesus came to Jerusalem on P –6. The entry occurred the following day, that is, P –5 (Jn. 12:12). In the Synoptics, the crucifixion took place on P, so Mk. 14:12 = P –1, the day before the crucifixion, and Mk. 14:1 = P – 2, 'two days before the P'. Working backwards, Mk. 11:20 refers to the morning of the previous day (that is, P –3), and the day preceding that, referred to in Mk. 11:12 and 19 is P –4. According to Mk.

11:1, the entry occurred on the day before that (P –5), the same day as in John. No firm conclusions can be drawn from this, but it seems that the Synoptic and Johannine chronologies are not designed to contradict one another, but are in harmony here.

The character of the Last Supper as reported in all the Gospels lends further support to this. Jeremias makes no fewer than fourteen observations from the accounts indicating that it was a Passover meal,[18] and Rüchstuhl selects six of these as being 'a very strong argument for the paschal character of the Last Supper'.[19] Cited briefly, they are these: first, that the Last Supper took place in Jerusalem, in accordance with the strict paschal rule, despite the fact that Jesus was accustomed to leave the city in the early evening. Moreover, it took place at night, beginning at a late hour, unlike other meals, and it appears that only the twelve were present—about the number consistent with Passover practice. All four Gospels state that Jesus reclined with his disciples at this meal, which was a ritual duty at the Passover, and as Jeremias puts it: 'absolutely impossible at an ordinary meal'.[20] The hymn with which the meal concluded must have been the paschal *Hallel*, after which Jesus went to Gethsemane where Judas knew he would be for certain, because of the paschal regulation that one had to remain within a small radius of Jerusalem.

However, this reason might be rejected, since Lk. 21:37 and 22:34 indicate that Jesus used this overnight shelter on other nights of the week. Jeremias regards as 'of absolutely decisive significance'[21] Jesus' words of interpretation over the bread and wine, as interpretation of the special elements of the meal as a fixed part of the Passover ritual. There is also the indication in Jn. 13:10 of their observance of the paschal liturgical purification requirement. The reasons for the absence of description of the paschal ritual itself are probably both practical and theological. The Early Church did *not* celebrate the Eucharist annually with a Passover ritual, which rather belonged to what 'is obsolete and ready to vanish away' (Heb. 8:13). Their interest was not in an outmoded Passover ritual, but in the institution of the Eucharist, which enshrined the new covenant.

It should be noted that the above observations are taken from all four Gospels, and are all the more significant because they are mentioned in the text as unimportant details. As Jeremias puts it: 'It cannot be said that only later embellishment has made the Last Supper a Passover meal, as the above observations concern not only the framework of the narrative but the substance'.[22] Evidently too, John and the Synoptics describe the same meal, for in addition to the observations made above, there are in all the accounts the identification of Judas as the traitor and his departure (Mk. 14:17ff.; Mt. 26:20ff.; Lk. 22:24; Jn. 13:21ff.), the prediction of Peter's denial by the time the cock crows (Mk. 14:30; Mt. 26:34; Lk. 22:34; Jn. 13:38) and the subsequent departure to Gethsemane. Luke and John's accounts both reflect a dispute among the disciples at the meal (Lk. 22:24ff.; Jn. 13:2ff.). This strand of evidence therefore also lends support

to the Synoptic chronology and to the search for a harmonizing solution.[23]

John 19:14

This verse states categorically that the day of the crucifixion was the Preparation of the Passover, which demands that we investigate what is meant by these two terms. Was Preparation (Greek: *paraskeue*) used only of the day before the Sabbath, or could it be used of the day before any feast day? Mk. 15:42 stated clearly that it was used of Friday, and both Lk. 23:54 and Jn. 19:31 support this. That it was generally understood to mean Friday is indicated by its use in the *Didache* 8:1, in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 7:1 and in Josephus, *Antiquities* 6, 2. The derivation of the term has been contested in several articles by C.C. Torrey and S. Zeitlin.[24] Torrey suggested that *paraskeue* is the Greek word for the Jewish technical term denoting the eve of the Sabbath, which was derived from the word for sunset. Zeitlin countered this, maintaining that the Hellenized Jews used *to sabbaton* to translate 'eve of the Sabbath', and that *paraskeue* could apply to any festival because it meant 'act of preparation'. In his later articles, Zeitlin asserts that Mk. 15:42 does not prove that *paraskeue* means Friday, but is an explanatory note for Jewish Christians who would not have understood its technical sense.

Torrey pays more attention to New Testament usage and states that in Mk. 15:42 *paraskeue* does not denote the action of preparation, but the day of the week. He adduces support for his derivation from the unusual construction of Mt. 27:62, where he maintains that the Jewish term has been mistranslated, and that it should have its older meaning of 'sunset'. A.J.B. Higgins, surveying this argument, points out (*contra* Zeitlin) that elsewhere (for example, 7:3, 11, 34) Mark elucidates a Jewish term for *Gentile* readers.[25] He favours with approval the latter's conclusion: 'There is no evidence to show that the word was used in the time of the Gospel writers for the eve of other festal days than the Sabbath'.[26] Further support for this comes from Jeremias, who points out that a contemporary Aramaic original for the phrase 'day of Preparation for the Passover' has not been found.[27]

As to the meaning of *Pascha*, it is clear that it often bears the narrow sense of Passover Lamb, or meal. In the Synoptics it is used in association with such verbs as *phagein*, *thyein*, *poiein* and *hetoimazein* (*cf.*, for example, Mk. 14:12–16; Lk. 22:15). According to the Old Testament background, this meal was eaten on the evening of 14 Nisan, and the following day was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Originally these two were kept distinct, and in New Testament times this distinction could be maintained, as for example by Josephus, when he depends on Old Testament passages.[28] But when he is not elucidating Biblical ritual, but describing contemporary practice, Josephus equates *Pascha* with the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

As W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich say in their Lexicon: 'popular usage

merged the two festivals and treated them as a unity, as they were for practical purposes'. That is to say that the feast day which followed the evening on which the Passover meal was eaten could be designated the 'Feast of the Passover', which indeed continued for seven days as laid down for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Indeed, Higgins says: '*Pascha* has become synonymous with *He heorte ton azymon* as a name for the whole festival period',[29] and this is reflected in the statement in *Mishnah* Pesahim 9:5 to the effect that 'the Passover of the generations continued throughout seven days'. This broadening of the meaning explains the presence of the phrase 'Feast of the Passover' in the New, as compared to its virtual absence from the Old, Testament.

Moreover this broader meaning of *Pascha* is supported by Synoptic usage, particularly Lk. 22:1. It explains Mk. 14:1 and Mt. 26:2 as referring to the day of the Passover *festival*, that is the day on which the crucifixion occurred. This was on the day following the night on which the meal was eaten.[30] Finally, Johannine usage of *Pascha* confirms the broader meaning. Twice he refers to the Passover of the Jews (2:13; 11:55), three times to the feast of the Passover (2:23; 6:4; 13:1), and three times also simply to the Feast (12:12, 20; 13:29) and to the Passover (11:55; 12:1; 18:39). Consideration of these occurrences in their contexts indicates that *he heorte* and *to Pascha* are equivalent in these verses, referring to the feast to which one goes, and not to the meal which one eats. It is probably in this sense that *Pascha* should be understood in Jn. 13:1, which would mean that on the evening before the Feast day Jesus knew what was going to happen.

In conclusion therefore, Jn. 19:14 may tentatively be taken to read 'Friday in Passover week'. The absolute connotation of *paraskeue*, even when connected with *to Pascha* is affirmed by J. Bernard,[31] who points out that if *paraskeue* had meant the day of preparation for the Passover it would have had an article. If it is objected that the day should have been called the Feast of the Passover, the answer may be that in view of the demonstrated ambiguity of that phrase, *paraskeue* was used for precision. Furthermore, Billerbeck says: 'This (that is, *paraskeue*) one called without hesitation a first feast day if it fell on a Friday'.[32]

John 18:28

Bammel's suggestion, discussed above, that the words *alla phagosi to Pascha* are a later addition, is based on Merx's assertion that there was no special purity requirement in connexion with eating the Passover which required separation from the Gentiles. Hence this addition represents a misconception: the feared uncleanness was in fact simply that which would have made them unfit to serve the altar. However, it does seem that John is uniquely conscious, among the Gospel writers, of contemporary purity requirements for the Passover in particular. Thus in Jn. 11:55 he mentions that 'many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the

Passover to purify themselves'. The time reference in 12:1 indicates an accurate knowledge of the preliminary period of purification to be observed by those who wished to attend the feast. J.B. Segal emphasizes that ritual cleanness was required for the Passover meal itself,[33] and Jn. 13:10 reflects the fact that the disciples had observed this requirement, when Jesus washed their feet, saying 'he who has bathed does not need to wash except for his feet, and he is clean all over'. It is also consistent with Old Testament practice, for example, Ezra 6:19ff.: 'the priests and the Levites had purified themselves . . . the Passover Lamb was eaten . . . by everyone who had joined them and had separated himself from the pollutions of the people'. And compare 2 Chron. 30:18, where the cleanness requirement had not been observed by some, who 'had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than prescribed'.

In Jn. 18:28f. the priest's scruples were evidently respected by Pilate, for 'he went out to them' (*cf.* Mk. 15:16; Mt. 27:27: after the interrogation, they led Jesus *into* the praetorium). There must have been some well-defined cause of defilement which Pilate accepted, but its identity is not clear. Contemporary casuistry considered close association with Gentiles as unlawful (Acts 10:28). Moreover there is the statement in *Mishnah* Oholoth 18:7: 'The dwelling places of the Gentiles are unclean'. The reason for this, according to H. Danby, is that 'they throw abortions down their drains'.[34] But Dr. Teicher, in a private conversation with the author, maintains that 'Gentiles' is a mistranslation of the word *Kena'im* which means Kenites, whose dwellings were contaminated with animals and cadavers. This would not have been the basis for the uncleanness of the praetorium. Another possibility is the dust of the roads brought by foreign visitors who frequented the praetorium. This dust was considered unclean (*cf. Mishnah* Berakoth 9:5: 'He may not enter into the Temple Mount . . . with the dust on his feet') and when Jews returned from Gentile countries they had to be purified (*cf.* Paul in Acts 21:26). Other suggestions include the presence of a figure of the emperor, Roman eagles or dead bodies, and the impurity of the governor because of his wife, but Dr. Teicher considers foreign visitors as the most likely reason.

A. Buchler[35] shows that the cause of the uncleanness of the praetorium was not the assumed presence of a buried corpse. The treasurers of the Temple used to go to the Roman fortress of Antonia which did not differ in character from the praetorium, to fetch the robe of the High Priest from the Gentile commandant. Buchler says:

> Their defilement by the Antonia and by the Gentile commandant of the fortress cannot have been grave as they were permitted to enter the Temple buildings at once and to partake of the paschal sacrificial meal in the evening of the same day. The defilement contracted by the noble priests as well as that attaching to the robe, was evidently removed by an immersion before nightfall.

Therefore the feared defilement was not that from contact with dead bodies, which lasted a week, but whatever its precise nature, it was a one-day uncleanness which lasted, as Segal says, 'only till sundown'.[36] This would not have prevented the priests from *eating* their Passover meal that evening.

Buchler states that

> in accordance with the requirements explicitly stated by Josephus, all the Jews who intended to participate in the sacrificial meal of the Passover purified themselves for that occasion by immersion. As they were now in the required state of levitical purity they must not mix with the Gentiles, who, by their touch, might defile them and deprive them of their purity; therefore they must not enter the residence of the governor, where the Roman soldiers, just like those of Herod, would crowd round them.[37]

The tentative conclusion is that, being purified, the priests feared defilement which would have disqualified them for something *before* sundown that day. It is true that the slaughtering of the paschal lamb took place before sundown, but this does not seem to be in view here, for the phrase is *phagein to Pascha*, not *thyein*.

The fact that *to Pascha* is here in association with *phagein* virtually requires the meaning 'Passover Lamb' as in the Synoptics. Indeed, the use of the phrase *phagein to Pascha* in all four Gospels suggests that it represents the technical phrase for 'to eat the Passover Lamb', which it also means in the Septuagint (2 Chron. 30:18; Ezra 6:21). Bearing in mind the wider meaning that *Pascha* can have in the Gospels, especially in John, it has been claimed on the basis of 2 Chron. 30:22 that in Jn. 18:28 it has the extended sense of the whole festival. But Higgins regards this as 'not at all likely',[38] since the underlying meaning in 2 Chronicles is a customary expression for 'to celebrate the feast', which is different from the expression in Jn. 18:28.

A. Edersheim maintained that the reference is probably not to a paschal meal to be eaten *that evening*, since then uncleanness would not disqualify as a new day would have begun, but to the paschal *Chagigah*.[39] This was the festive offering brought on the first paschal day, that is the day after the evening on which the paschal meal was eaten. There is no doubt that this day was of great importance (for example, Num. 28:18f.) and as Edersheim says, the *Chagigah* was offered and eaten *during* that day. Dr. Teicher also emphasizes that the High Priest would *eat* the *Chagigah*. Hence they would avoid incurring a defilement which, lasting until evening, would have prevented this part of the celebration. There is, moreover, from the Old Testament evidence of the wider use of *Pascha* (Hebrew: *pesach*) in this sense: 2 Chron. 35:7–9 describes a variety of 'Passover offerings' and Deut. 16:3 refers to eating the Passover sacrifice for seven days. Billerbeck says:

> *Pesach* may indeed mean Passover—Feast—Sacrifice, but only under certain circumstances, i.e. when the context demands it. In the above passages it is mentioned that cattle were slaughtered as *Pesach*. The mention of cattle as sacrificial animals demands that one think in terms of feast sacrifices for the Passover in the broader sense, since only one-year old sheep or goats could be used for the actual paschal service [which preceded the paschal meal].[40]

However, it is improbable that *Pascha* in Jn. 18:28 refers to this. Zeitlin maintains that 'if for any reason a Jew did not offer the *Chagigah* on the first day of Passover, he could offer it on any other day during the seven days of the Festival'.[41] As Billerbeck goes on to say:

> If one considers that the Fourth Gospel had been written for Gentile Christians too, who knew the significance of the Jewish paschal lamb but hardly had an intimate knowledge of the paschal *Chagigah*; if one continues to consider that there is no compelling reason to take *Pascha* in anything other than its usual meaning, then the conclusion is beyond doubt: *phagein to Pascha* means the eating of the Paschal Lamb.[42]

But this interpretation is problematical: it requires an explanation of how the priests could legitimately eat their Passover early in the morning after the night in which they should have eaten it, especially as there is no other example of this known from antiquity. For the Exodus tradition is clear (12:8–10) and the *Mishnah* is equally explicit (Pesachim 10:9): 'After midnight the Passover offering renders the hands unclean'; (Zebahim 5:8): 'The Passover-offering could be eaten only during that night, and only until midnight'. The question of the date of the *Mishnah* regulations will be considered below, but there is reason to think that they may be simply the result of a *later* tendency to enforce orthodox practice with stricter precision. The Tannaitic Midrashim to Exodus, now designated by the name *Mekilta* states: 'Why then have the sages said "Up to midnight?" To prevent the possibility of a transgression of the law, and to make a fence round the Torah'.[43] But on his own understanding of the Exodus text R. Ishmael says: 'I might understand this to mean all night', that is, up to daytime. There is however teaching against this in v. 10. Why is 'until the morning repeated? Scripture aims thereby to fix its limit only up to the very break of morning, and what is this? It is the early dawn. Hence they said: 'The duty of eating the Paschal Lamb, eating the sacrifices and burning the fat and the parts of the sacrifices can be performed up to the rise of the dawn'.[44]

Surely this is the whole point of the time references in Jn. 18:27–28. The events described there evidently occurred in the latter part of the night, or at early dawn, when, on the basis of the interpretation of the *Mekilta*, it is not impossible that the priests still had to eat their paschal meal. That is to say, they had planned to eat before dawn but the events

had delayed them. There is good reason to suppose that the priests had not eaten their paschal meal at the same time as Jesus and his disciples ate theirs (that is at the prescribed time, see Mt. 26:20), because of the large numbers of pilgrims in Jerusalem at that time. Jeremias has a detailed excursus on this number,[45] in which he cites four sources, including Josephus and Tacitus, which yield 'such fantastic figures that we cannot regard them as historically accurate'. His own figure is 180,000 people, requiring 18,000 lambs. While it is true that the head of each household assisted in the slaughter of his lamb, it is improbable that the large number of lambs to be slaughtered would have been killed before midnight, and the priests would not have eaten until their work was finished. This may have meant that they could not have eaten at the prescribed time. Segal says: 'The rule that the meal was to be eaten only at night had been modified—perhaps on account of the great number of pilgrims who now participated at the *Pesach*'.[46]

It may therefore tentatively be suggested that the explanation of Jn. 18:28 is that the priests, early on the morning of the day on which Jesus was crucified, still had to eat their own paschal meal. At the time at which they should have eaten they were involved either in planning or in carrying out the interrogation and condemnation of Jesus. The picture of the night trials in the Gospels is somewhat confused, but the common factor is that they were carried out under pressure. For originally the priests had decided to arrest him 'not during the feast, lest there be a tumult of the people' (Mk. 14:2). However, Judas' offer was not to be missed because Jesus might well have left Jerusalem after the Sabbath, as did the two disciples in Lk. 24:13ff. Therefore, having received Judas' offer (Mk. 14:10), after his advance warning (Mk. 14:43; Jn. 18:3), they assembled their brethren (Mk. 15:43) who would otherwise have been eating their paschal supper, and possibly also alerted Pilate. They then worked intensively through the night to secure charges against Jesus which they might press before Pilate. Therefore when they came to Pilate early (18:28) they had not yet eaten their paschal meal.[47] Finally, it is important to notice that in John there is no hint that anyone ate the paschal meal on the night of the crucifixion. Indeed, the opposite is implied by the reported action of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (19:38ff.) who buried the body, which would definitely have disqualified them from eating the paschal meal at that time (*cf.* Num. 9:11). It seems most probable that they had already eaten.

Tentative Solution and Concluding Considerations

On the basis of the above, it is possible to harmonize the chronology of John and the Synoptics in their accounts of the crucifixion and the Passover. The meal described in Jn. 13 was the Last Supper, as in the Synoptics, and a Passover meal. Particularly interesting is the further account in verse 29: 'Some thought that because Judas had the money-box, Jesus was telling him: "Buy what we need for the feast", or that he should

give something to the poor'. This seems to suggest that the evening was the one on which the paschal meal was eaten, since had it been the previous evening Judas could perfectly well have gone out for food on the following day. But as Jeremias says: 'The situation would be quite different if the incident occurred on the Passover evening, for then the matter would be urgent because the next day was a high feast day, and the day following that a Sabbath'.[48] He does not consider that the Jewish mode of reckoning the new day from sunset the previous evening would have made it impossible for the disciples to imagine that Judas was going to buy food on the Passover meal evening.

Their alternative conjecture was that Judas had departed to give something to the poor. It was customary to do something for the poor on Passover night; the Temple gates stood open from midnight onwards, and the beggars were waiting there. But on another night it is hard to see why the disciples should have imagined Judas being sent out for this purpose; it could easily have been done in the daytime. Hence it is most probable that the Passover meal was eaten on the night before the crucifixion. This would not have made impossible the presence of a crowd early next morning, for the *Mishnah* prescribes that 'after the Passover meal they should not disperse to join in revelry' (Pesahim 10:8). The next day, Friday, Jesus was crucified, and the following day was a Sabbath. Jn. 19:31 adds that 'the Sabbath was a high day'. Now clearly if, against the Synoptic chronology, that Sabbath was the first paschal day, it would have been great for that reason. But if it was the second paschal day, as proposed in the present solution, 'then it was great because on it one brought the 'Omer gift according to Pharisaic tradition'.[49] This is the sheaf-offering described by Philo: 'Within the feast there is another feast following directly after the first day. This is called the Sheaf'.[50] Segal confirms the great importance of this ceremony. 'It was carried out with deliberate display; it was held to override the Sabbath . . . there is no doubt that the ceremony was held, according to the accepted practice, on the second day of the Passover week'.[51] The fact that it was held to override the Sabbath, generally unrivalled in the importance attached to its observance, shows the great significance of this day. It is the most probable reason for the qualification of that Sabbath as 'a great day'.

Yet problems remain for the present attempt at a harmonistic solution, for it is necessary to explain how the execution of Jesus could have been carried out on a feast day. This day had the character of a Sabbath to a limited extent, as the *Mishnah* (Betzah 5:2) says: 'Any act that is culpable on the Sabbath . . . is culpable also on a festival day. . . . A festival day differs from the Sabbath in nought save in the preparing of needful food'. The *Mekilta* on Exodus 12:16, 'on the first day you shall hold a holy assembly . . . no work shall be done on those days', agrees when it says 'only the holiday may be disregarded for any work necessary for the preparation of food, but the Sabbath is not to be disregarded for any work necessary for

the preparation of food'. Certainly therefore, an execution would have been contrary to the sabbatical nature of the first paschal day. However, Deut. 17:12–13 prescribes the death penalty for anyone who opposes the decisions of the priests, to be carried out so that 'all the people shall hear and fear', and the *Mishnah* (Sanhedrin 11:4) gives special instructions for the execution of a rebellious teacher: 'He was kept in guard until one of the three feasts, and he was put to death on one of the three feasts'. This shows that in certain circumstances executions were permitted on feast days. Moreover, Billerbeck says that where an example is required 'to protect the Torah from wilfully severe transgressions, an execution may, as an exception, supersede a feast day'.[52]

The execution itself therefore does not constitute a problem, especially when it is realized that in the event it was Pilate's responsibility because Roman soldiers carried it out. Nor does the burial, which was in accordance with the express rule of Deut. 21:23. Jeremias deals with eight other events reported in the Gospel accounts which are claimed to be inconsistent with the Sabbatical character of the first paschal day, and comes to the conclusion that 'the passion narratives portray no incident which could not have taken place on 15 Nisan'[53] (the first paschal day). But the most important objection must be examined in more detail, since it is the question of the legality of the Sanhedrin trial.

Compared to the trial procedure laid down in the *Mishnah*, the reports of the trial of Jesus detail by detail give the impression 'that the Sanhedrists committed a whole series of irregularities.[54] The *Mishnah* (Sanhedrin 4:1) states that, in capital cases

> they hold the trial during the daytime . . . and the verdict must also be reached during the daytime . . . a verdict of conviction not until the following day. Therefore trials may not be held on the eve of the Sabbath, or on the eve of a festival day.

In all four Gospels, Jesus was tried at a night session, and in the Synoptics a verdict was explicitly reached that night. It should be emphasized that if it could be proved that the Sanhedrists adhered to this stipulation not only the Synoptic chronology, but also that which is frequently put forward for John, *viz.* that the Passover meal was eaten on the night of the crucifixion, would be ruled out, for the eve of the festival day began at sunset, but the trial started after that.

However, the Synoptic chronology is not impossible, for as Blinzler says, the prohibition of legal proceedings on feast days was less strictly enforced than that of holding courts on the Sabbath, 'therefore it is quite thinkable that it did not seem to the Sanhedrists an infringement of an important rule to start a legal trial even on the night of the Pesach'.[55] It is the argument of this article that all the Gospels witness to such a trial which, while viable in its date, contravened accepted practice as subse-

quently enshrined in the *Mishnah* at many points, as Blinzler shows. For example, the proceedings took place in the house of Caiaphas, not in the Temple, and though Jesus had not actually pronounced the Name of God, he was condemned as a blasphemer. He was not offered an advocate; the witnesses were not warned before being examined; nor were they called to account for false witness. The members of the Sanhedrin, although witnesses of the alleged blasphemy, took part in the passing of the sentence, though it was not legal for them to do so.

As Blinzler says, one is not able 'to spare the Sanhedrin the reproach of very serious infringement of the law'.[56] The question is, why did they do this? 'It will not do to suggest that the occasion was a sham—the proceedings were undoubtedly carried through before a competent bench of judges'.[57] Nor can their contraventions of the Mishnaic code be simply dismissed by saying that it was not yet in force. It is true that it was not codified until about 200 AD, and reflects conditions which obtained then, but it certainly enshrines earlier practice to a considerable extent.[58] For example, Segal says that in describing Temple ritual, it may be employed with confidence.[59] May not the same apply to legal practice?

Before the Feast of the Passover Caiaphas is reported to have said in council: 'It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish' (Jn. 11:50). Expediency was the factor which determined his conduct. When the opportunity unexpectedly presented itself to secure Jesus' death, he and the priests avidly took it. Spurred on by their hatred of him; persuaded that as he was a false teacher, his execution on a feast day would be appropriate; and pressurized by shortage of time, they held his trial on the paschal night. In this trial they contravened normal legal practice at many points. The fact that they could do this in the legal sphere makes it likely that they could, because of the exceptional circumstances, also contravene ritual practice. For the exigencies of the case demanded that they work through the night. Early next morning therefore, they still had not eaten their paschal meal.

The conclusion of this article is that the Synoptics and John do not contradict one another in the chronology which they present of the crucifixion and Passover. It is suggested that in both, the date of the paschal meal was the night before the crucifixion. When John is taken to be in agreement with the Synoptics, a clearer picture is given of the events and atmosphere of that night.

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NOTES

1 See R.T. France, *The Man They Crucified*, London, 1975, p. 136.

2 So V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, London, 1966, pp. 535–6; D.E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark*, London, 1968.

3 *History and Interpretation in the Gospels*, London, 1934, p. 140ff.
4 In *Der Paschalbericht*, Münster, 1953, cited by E. Rückstuhl in *Chronology of the Last Days of Jesus*, English Translation, New York, 1965, p. 21ff.
5 Rückstuhl, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
6 *Ibid.*, pp. 22–3.
7 *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge University Press, 1953, p. 424.
8 'La cène de la Pâque dans le Nouveau Testament; in *Lumière et Vie* 31, 1951, p. 31.
9 *La date de la Cène*, Paris, 1957.
10 Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
11 Blinzler, *The Trial of Jesus*, English Translation, Cork, 1959, p. 79.
12 H.L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* II, München, 1924, pp. 847–53.
13 Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 23ff.
14 *New Testament Essays*, London, 1965, p. 160.
15 'Are both the Synoptics and John correct?' in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80, 1961, pp. 123–32.
16 Of course there are disagreements too; the Bethany anointing (Jn. 12:2ff. as compared to Mk. 14:3ff.); the hour of the crucifixion (Jn. 19:14 as compared to Mk. 15:25).
17 *Mishnah* Pesahim 8:6 has been taken to refer to this, and to invalidate the Synoptic chronology because it implies that the prisoner was released to eat the Passover that night. But Jeremias (*op. cit.*, p. 73) quotes the Jerusalem Talmud to show that the Mishnah refers to a prisoner held by the Jewish authorities, not to the Roman Passover amnesty.
18 Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 41ff.
19 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
20 *Ibid.*, p. 49.
21 *Ibid.*, p. 55f.
22 *Ibid.*, p. 61.
23 Two verses may be cited as obstacles to this tentative conclusion. Jn. 13:1 is discussed below. Lk. 22:15 could be taken to express unfulfilled desire, but C.K. Barratt, in 'Luke 22:15: To Eat the Passover', in *Journal of Theological Studies* NS, 9, 1958, pp. 305–7, concludes that the Greek phrase *touto to Pascha* must almost certainly mean 'this lamb before me'. Moreover *phagein* governs the meaning of *Pascha*, implying that 'the paschal meal, including the paschal lamb, lay on the table before Jesus'.
24 C.C. Torrey, 'The Date of the Crucifixion according to the Fourth Gospel' in *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. L, 1931, Part IV, p. 227ff. S. Zeitlin, 'The Date of the Crucifixion according to the Fourth Gospel' in *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. LI, 1932, Part III, p. 263ff; C.C. Torrey, 'In the Fourth Gospel the Last Supper was the Paschal Meal', in *Jewish Quarterly Review* Vol. XLII, 1952, p. 237ff. followed by S. Zeitlin, 'The Last Supper as an Ordinary Meal in the Fourth Gospel' in the same journal, p. 251ff.
25 'The Origins of the Eucharist', in *New Testament Studies* NS, 1, 1954–5, p. 206.
26 Torrey, in *Jewish Quarterly Review, loc. cit.*
27 Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
28 Josephus, *Antiquities* III, 10.5.
29 Higgins, *art. cit.*, p.204.
30 At first sight there is undoubtedly a problem presented by Mk. 14:12 which designates the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread as the day on which they sacrificed the Passover Lamb, whereas according to the above the Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the following day. Lk. 22:7 is similar, although it simply says 'the day of unleavened bread'. Interestingly, the Western text reads 'the day of the Passover'. In the context the latter implies that it was the day on which the Passover was eaten that evening. The problem is to explain how this day could be called the (first) day) of Unleavened Bread. The picture does not seem to be quite clear even in the Old Testament, for Dt. 16:4 refers to the first day as that on which the Passover Lamb was sacrificed. The Mekilta on Ex.

12:15 ('on the first day you shall put away leaven out of your houses') states: 'This means on the day preceding the holiday', and indeed, this seems probable in view of the fact that on the evening of 14 Nisan they were to eat unleavened bread (Ex. 12:18). Josephus (*Jewish War* V, 3.1) speaks of the Feast of Unleavened Bread beginning on 14 Nisan. Zeitlin (*loc. cit.* in *Jewish Quarterly Review*) says that 'the term unleavened bread for the fourteenth Nisan is proper since the Jews were prohibited from eating leavened bread on 14th Nisan at the time of the slaughtering of the paschal lamb'. Moreover, J.B. Segal's judgment is that the day preceding the Passover 'involved the ordinary Jew in preparations so complex' as to give that day 'something of the character of an actual festival' (*The Hebrew Passover*, London, 1963, p. 261).

31 *The Gospel according to St. John* Vol. II, Edinburgh, 1928, p. 623.
32 *Ibid.*, p. 829.
33 Segal, *op. cit.*, p.37.
34 *The Mishnah*, Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 675, n. 10.
35 'The Levitical Impurity of the Gentile in Palestine before the Year 70' in *Jewish Quarterly Review* vol. 17, 1927, p. 28ff.
36 Segal, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
37 Buchler, *art. cit.*, p. 24.
38 Higgins, *art. cit.*, p. 206.
39 *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, London, 1906, Vol. II, p. 567ff.
40 Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, p. 837.
41 Zeitlin, *art. cit.*, in *Jewish Quarterly Review*.
42 Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, p. 839.
43 *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, Vol. 1, Philadelphia, 1933, p. 46.
44 *Loc. cit.*
45 Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, English Translation, London, 1969, pp. 77–83.
46 Segal, *op. cit.*, p. 32. He is discussing the evidence of *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesin et in Exodum* ascribed to Philo, which he regards as providing contemporary evidence. In the Exodus volume (1:13), there is the question: 'Why does he command them to eat the flesh of the Paschal Lamb at night?' Segal's argument is that the use of this question formula suggests that the practice has been modified.
47 This solution was advocated by W. Milligan and W.F. Moulton, *The Gospel of St John*, Edinburgh, 1898. They maintain (p. 204f.) that the hour referred to as 'early' in Jn. 18:28 was 3–3:30 a.m. They suggest that the priests had begun their paschal meal, but had been interrupted by Judas' betrayal. It was precisely because they desired to complete the meal as soon as possible that they were so scrupulous about entering the praetorium.
48 Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*. p. 53.
49 H.L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, p. 582.
50 Philo, *De specialibus legibus* II.
51 Segal, *op. cit.*, p. 264.
52 Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, p. 826.
53 Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, p. 79.
54 Blinzler, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
55 *Ibid.*, p. 143ff.
56 *Ibid.*, p. 138.
57 *Ibid.*, p. 141.
58 Blinzler (*ibid.*, pp. 149–57) concludes that Jesus' trial was in accordance with a criminal code then in force, a Sadducean code. But Rückstuhl (*op. cit.*, p. 35f.) rejects the assumption of a Sadducean code, saying that 'Criminal trials at night were forbidden in the entire Hellenistic world'.
59 Segal, *op. cit.*, p. 257.