In *Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema*, Pam Cook identifies costume, hair and décor as the ‘symbolic carriers of period detail’; they provide the film with verisimilitude, and they make the past seem tangible. ‘However,’ as Cook continues, they are also ‘notoriously slippery and anachronistic’. There is a ‘tension between truthfulness and infidelity’ bound up in costume that, at the same time, informs and subverts historical awareness.¹ This is usually because costume both recreates historical dress and represents contemporary fashions. It is also because costume is used to evoke emotions that enhance a narrative, and thus designers will diverge from accurate recreations in order to achieve this. Walter Plunkett’s frothy, voluminous dresses created for *Gone with the Wind* epitomize the successful amalgamation of historical knowledge, contemporary fashion and

emotive appeal (see image 5, plate section). Although skirts in the 1850s were never as large as he presented, and by the early days of the Civil War dresses of that style had already begun to narrow, the costumes Plunkett chose spoke to the over-indulgent decadence of the Southern Plantation owner. They also, perhaps problematically, evoked a sense of nostalgia for a by-gone era. To that point, it is worth remembering that all period dramas, even those that hold the highest regard for the past they are recreating, contain an element of fantasy. The audience is not expecting a documentary, and there should be no responsibility to provide one.

Costume, therefore, communicates much to the audience apart from historical context:

1. As I have already mentioned, it reflects contemporary fashions. This is often simply to make it visually appealing to a modern audience as concepts of beauty vary over time, but it can also be a means of better communicating elements of historic fashion that do not translate well by contemporary modes of dress. The fashions we use to express social mores – such as sexuality, morality, gender roles and socio-economic hierarchies – are as fluid as these notions themselves. However, we will often 'read' historic fashion from within our contemporary mindset, with our current understanding of social mores, and therefore 'misread' what the historic fashion was communicating. Costumers can correct this with anachronistic detailing: cutting a dress to communicate modern ideas regarding purity or promiscuity, for example, by altering necklines instead of hemlines.

2. It is one of the key components of characterization, providing the audience with visual clues to the character's personality and motivations. The costuming of Judas in Cecil B. DeMille's King of Kings (1927) visually indicates his eventual betrayal of Jesus. Judas is extravagantly and flamboyantly dressed, especially when seen in comparison to the other disciples, giving the audience the impression of a materialistic and superficial individual. Costume designer Deborah Nadoolman Landis explains that clothes function as 'social and emotional signposts' for all members of society; in film, they help an audience

2. Edward Maeder provides a good discussion of the costumes in Gone with the Wind and the important difference between verisimilitude – what one tends to see – and accurate historical recreation – what one often thinks they are seeing – in period film costuming. As regards Plunkett's very admirable attempt, Maeder writes: 'Viewers left the theatre convinced that they had just seen a true reflection of the past; but almost half a century later, a fashion historian cannot help noticing that many aspects of the film's costume styles are rooted more in the 1930s [when Gone with the Wind was made] than in the 1860s.' Edward Maeder, 'The Celluloid Image: Historical Dress in Film', in Maeder (ed.), Hollywood and History: Costume Design in Film (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), pp. 9–51.

3. In biblical films, the costuming of Mary Magdalene best illustrates this concept. See especially, The King of Kings (1927), The Last Temptation of Christ (1988) and The Bible (2013).
better understand a character’s ‘moods, tastes and personality, [their] social and economic aspirations and the time in which [they] live.’

3. *Interpretation* of the period, people, or events is also seen through costume. Mel Gibson’s understanding of the New Testament, born from his particular Catholic faith, is clearly evident in his costuming of Mary and Mary Magdalene in a nun-like fashion. In *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Jesus and his followers are presented as hippies (in the film), or as Occupy Wall St. protesters (in the recent stage version). These costumes guide the audience to interpret the message as one that is similar to these politically-motivated groups, thereby presenting Jesus’ mission as anti-establishment; part of a counterculture movement.

4. The costuming might also reflect, or magnify, a pre-existing bias or prejudice. Or, by the same token, it can be used to correct or combat such things by intentionally avoiding stereotyping. In the case of New Testament dramatizations, the biggest concern here is anti-Semitism or anti-Judaism. This can be anything from overt displays of Jewish stereotypes to more subtle displays of religio-cultural difference between Jesus and his followers, and those with whom he came into conflict. This latter type is often accomplished by costuming Jesus and his disciples in an Occidental manner, showing a greater commonality with Western audiences, and the Priests and Pharisees in an Oriental one: demonstrating ‘Othering’ through costume. Ivan Davidson Kalmar provides an excellent analysis of this in his essay ‘Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban’. Kalmar astutely points out that, in art, Orientalist detailing increases in intensity the further away one gets from ‘belief in Jesus.’


5. When interviewed about designing the costumes for *The Passion of the Christ*, Maurizio Millenotti, said, ‘Mel Gibson had a very clear vision of the look of the movie and he guided me while at the same time giving me complete creative freedom.’ Landis, *Filmcraft: Costume Design* (Lewes, UK: ILEX, 2012), pp. 114–23.


7. It is very common to find that the costumes of Caiaphas, the other members of the Sanhedrin, and the Pharisees (i.e. those who opposed Jesus) include elements of overt religiosity reminiscent of Orthodox Judaism, such as payot (side-curls), long beards, large black hats (or other dark head covering), prayer shawls and tefillin, whilst Jesus and his disciples are rarely seen with any of these items. See especially, *Intolerance* (1916), *The King of Kings* (1927), *King of Kings* (1961), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) and *Mesih* (2007), an Iranian film that tells the story of Jesus from the Qu’ranic perspective.

8. Kalmar catalogues the consistent and ‘unchanging formal underpinning of Orientalist art with biblical subjects’ using two main rules: the first is iterated in the title of Kalmar’s essay – Jesus is given exceptional status and thus rarely, if ever, wears a turban (or other form of head-covering). Kalmar dubs this the ‘Occidental Jesus rule.’ The second rule, the
and analysis can easily be applied to costuming to present similar findings:
Even as we better understand Jesus as Jewish, through ‘group dress’ we are still visually representing Jesus and those who followed him as quite theologically, socially, and culturally removed from those with whom he disagreed, despite their commonalities.

Whatever the end result, all successful period costuming begins the same way: with a strong foundation in history. Creative decisions are made after academic research, allowing designers to capture the feel of the period, even if the clothing itself is anachronistic. When it comes to biblical epics, often classed within the broader ‘period drama’ or ‘historical film’ genres, however, little research seems to be employed; traditional imagery (itself changing over time) instead seems to provide the framework for costuming the 1st century. This is not entirely the fault of the filmmakers, however, as academia has little to offer them. Jewish clothing of the 1st century is quite an understudied topic.

There are a number of reasons for this, the primary one being a supposed lack of source material (which I discuss in this chapter). This can also be attributed to academia’s seeming hesitance to give due weight to fashion history, viewing the topic as inferior to other, more ‘legitimate’ aspects of historical study. However, clothing has always played a central role in how individuals express identity, culture, religion and social position. The idea that what one wore communicated these aspects of one’s life was so well understood, that, in the West at least, from the Roman Empire through the Elizabethan period, sumptuary legislation controlled nearly every aspect of textile production and use, and thus what people from different classes could wear. Only citizens of Rome, for example, were permitted to wear the toga. Even aspects of clothing that were not legislated were carefully considered. The voluminosity or restrictive nature of one’s clothing spoke to one’s

‘Implicational Hierarchy of Biblical Orientalism,’ dictates that representations of the rest of the biblical characters are relative to the first rule. This means, that however Oriental or Occidental Jesus is presented, every other character in the narrative will be presented incrementally more Oriental the further removed they are from belief in him. Thus the disciples will be just slightly more Oriental than Jesus, ‘the crowd’ (ho ochlos, being a character in its own right) will be more Oriental than the disciples, the Pharisees more Oriental than ‘the crowd’, and so on. Ivan Davidson Kalmar, ‘Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban: Orientalism, The Jews, and Christian Art’, in Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar (eds), Orientalism and the Jews (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England), pp. 3–31, at pp. 29–31.

9. ’In the cinema, the actor must fully inhabit the character; the audience’s suspension of disbelief is essential . . . No matter in what era the story is set, the audience is asked to believe that the people in the movie are real and that they had a life prior to the start of the action.’ If a costume feels inauthentic (even if it is ‘accurate’) or if it is too distracting, it will adversely affect the audience’s ability to suspend disbelief. Landis, Hollywood Costume, p. 48.
wealth, as an individual who needed to farm, cook and clean for themselves would need to be less encumbered by fabric and corsetry. It is short-sighted to ignore such an important aspect of how people from a particular period expressed their own identity and imposed identity on others, how they demonstrated values and hierarchies.

Despite its importance any exploration into Jewish dress is fraught with evidentiary problems. Whilst one should not be deterred by a shortage of materials, a shortage there most definitely is. Anybody attempting to find out how Jewish people of the 1st century dressed is faced with the same basic problem: Jews did not depict themselves or the human form more generally in art, understanding biblical prohibitions regarding idolatry as restricting such displays (Exod. 20.3–6; Lev. 26.1; Num. 33.52; Deut. 4.16, 27.15). As textiles, especially those made from wool and linen, do not generally preserve well, artistic representations of dress are immensely valuable for the historian, and it is in this form of evidence that the Jewish people of the Roman Empire, particularly those in the Palestinian region, largely remain a mystery. This does not mean, however, that there isn’t evidence to be found. There is enough to give us a strong sense of the type of clothing that would have been worn by the people of Judaea.

The most spectacular and convincing evidence comes from an archaeological discovery made more than 50 years ago. In 1960, a group of Israeli archaeologists and volunteers led by Yigael Yadin set out into the Judean Desert to excavate a number of caves just south of Qumran near Masada. The entrance to one cave in particular, set fifty feet up a steep rocky cliff-side, presented a challenge to Yadin and his team. Once there, however, the rewards for their effort proved monumental. Inside this large, remote cave, now known as the ‘Cave of Letters’, were dozens of items ranging from common daily objects, such as baskets, dishes and knives, to bronze ritual urns and bowls of Roman origin, as well as numerous human remains. Hidden down a narrow passage, Yadin discovered a treasure-trove of documents and the remains of a woman named Babata and her family. The letters, it was determined, were military orders signed by Simeon Bar Kochba, the leader of the second Jewish revolt against Rome (in 132–136 CE), the first historical evidence of his life. Based on the documents, as well as the discovery of coins minted by Bar Kochba’s followers, it was concluded that Babata, her family, and the other members of the cave had been hiding out after the failed revolt. The manufacture of the materials has been dated to between 120 and 135 CE. The climate within the cave and its surrounds had preserved the artefacts very well, and thus Yadin and his team also discovered, what remains to this day, some of the most complete and earliest examples of ancient dress including sandals, jewelry, scarves, blankets, balls of spun and dyed yarn, men’s and women’s mantels, burial shrouds and a child’s tunic.10

The first thing to note about the clothing discovered is that there is nothing really remarkable about it. It conforms, almost entirely, in shape, colour, design and manufacturing, to wider Graeco-Roman fashion, especially that of the Eastern region of the Roman Empire; the only difference being slight alterations to bring the clothing in line with Jewish law. The two laws of dress – shaatnez and tzitzit – set forth in Deuteronomy 22.11–12, as well as the adherence to purity laws, differentiated Jewish dress from its neighbours, though not in a manner immediately noticeable to the passer-by on the street. The law of shaatnez, prohibiting the mixing of fibres, would only have made a difference to the manufacture process.11 The balls of yarn found in the cave consisted of both wool and linen spun and kept separately from each other; they were not woven together in any of the garments. Adherence to purity laws similarly only seemed to affect clothing construction. In the Graeco-Roman world the tunic (Heb. haluq, Gk. chiton) was the primary article of clothing for men and women alike. It was generally made of one large rectangle of fabric, with the longer dimension wrapped horizontally around the body, pinned at the shoulders, sewn vertically along the short ends of the rectangle, and girded at the waist. Interestingly, the tunics found in the Cave of Letters are not made of a single piece of fabric, but of two (a front and a back), that would have been sewn together at the shoulders and down both sides of the body.12 Whether unique to Jews or not, it seems that this method aided in the maintenance of purity laws. If a garment became defiled through contact with an impurity, it was to be discarded – a great expense for most people in the first century. However, with two separable pieces of material, ‘the ritually unclean half of the tunic could . . . be removed and replaced without defiling the other half’.13 Or, as the Mishnah states: ‘And so also in the case of the two wings of a shirt, if a leprosy sign appeared on the one, the other remains clean’.14

The law of tzitzit meanwhile would have been applied to the other staple item of any Graeco-Roman person’s wardrobe – the cloak (also referred to as a mantle, Gk. himation), a large rectangle of fabric wrapped around the body over the tunic.

11. As weaving fibres separately was more technically demanding, and dying linen was difficult, the adherence to these prohibitions seemed to have created a specialty cottage industry within Jewish communities of skilled craftsman known for the ‘fine quality of [their] cloth’. See Lucille A. Roussin, ‘Costume in Roman Palestine: Archaeological Remains and the Evidence from the Mishnah’, in Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante (eds), The World of Roman Costume (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), pp. 182–90, at pp. 182–3.


14. Mishnah Nega‘im 11.9
This law required tassels, or *tzitzit*, to adorn each of the four corners of the cloak (known as a *tallit* – pl. *tallitot* – with this addition). Though the law of *tzitzit* does not specify gender, it has generally been assumed that it only applied to men, thus Jewish women would likely have worn their *himatia* without *tzitzit*. While this is a distinguishing feature of the garment, it is unclear whether this small addition alone would have marked out Jews, *ioudaioi*, as small drapery weights with tassels or fringes were sometimes added to the usual *himation* to help keep it in place on the body (see image 6, plate section).

In terms of overall appearance, the clothing remains from the Cave of Letters provide a reasonable place to start to build a picture, from which costume design could easily draw. Graeco-Roman tunics of the first century generally fell no longer than the base of the knee for men, and the ankle for women; the tunics Yadin and his team discovered are no exception. They are all adorned with *clavi* – vertical stripes running front and back, from shoulder to hem (see image 7, plate section). *Clavi* (as well as other clothing and accessory detailing) were used to designate rank or social function of the wearer. Based on the varying widths of *clavi* on the found tunics, Yadin theorized that they were used in this community to note age and status in a way similar to the Roman style – the wider the stripe, the older and more senior the individual. The inclusion of *clavi* allows the tunics to be compared to other tunics of the Roman East depicted in mosaics, sculpture, illustration and funerary art, as well as textual references in Talmudic and Gentile literature, thereby broadening the scope of available evidence. Although the *tallitot* discovered were in a poorer condition than the tunics, primarily in small fragments save for one nearly intact cloak, they too are decorated, coloured and woven in such a way as to permit comparison with alternative evidence. Thus whilst Jewish people may not have generally depicted the human form (though there are some exceptions which I discuss below), and therefore the available *direct* evidence is limited, the wealth of non-Jewish illustration from the period and the quality of finds from the

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15. The law of *tzitzit* is one of the few that has been explained: the *tzitzit* act as an ever-present reminder to the wearer of God’s commandments (Num. 15.39–40). Numbers 15.38 specifies the addition of blue thread in the tassels. It appears that the inhabitants of the Cave of Letters adhered to this proscription. Yadin concluded that a ball of spun and dyed blue wool (with a unique and expensive *kermes* dye) kept ‘carefully and separately wrapped’ was intended specifically for *tzitzit*, as the dye was not used in any of the other textiles. Yadin, *Finds from the Bar Kokhba Period*, pp. 182–3.


17. Though the use of *clavi* as a means to designate rank diminished and eventually disappeared over time (and was certainly already on its way out by the early 2nd century), ‘on the basis of the ages of the persons buried within the cave, it may be assumed that the children and youths wore tunics with narrow *clavi*, while the adults, including without doubt the district and town administrators and commanders of high rank, wore tunics with wide *clavi*. For a full discussion of *clavi* including a comparison between the finds and Talmudic references see Yadin, *Finds from the Bar Kokhba Period*, pp. 205–11.
The tunics in the illustrations at Dura also have sleeves that reach to the elbow. This feature is not mentioned in any comparison discussion with the textiles from the Cave of Letters that I have come across. It is my assumption that the sleeves and the slightly longer length of the tunics (to below the knee, as opposed to hitting the knee), is due to the time period in which they were painted – the third century – when these modifications to tunics were becoming more fashionable.

Dafna Shlezinger-Katsman notes that 'Roman-style clothes worn by Jewish men were not required to have show fringes' (Sifre Deut. 234). It could be that the mantle worn in a Roman way (wrapped over one shoulder so that the clavi on the tunic was visible) as
There are of course challenges to using the images at Dura when attempt to reconstruct a picture of Jewish clothing of first-century Judaea. As Bernard Goldman warns,

\[ \ldots \text{one must be mindful of the caveat that representations of dress in painting and sculpture need not necessarily reflect current styles. The depersonalized images of gods and heroized figures may be portrayed in the sort of traditional dress deemed appropriate to the figures' statures and roles rather than in the style currently in the streets.}^{20} \]

Other challenges specific to these images are, most notably, the synagogue’s late dating in relationship to the New Testament narrative, and its more easterly location, in modern-day Syria. In addition, the frescos depict Parthian-Iranian dress as well as the Graeco-Roman styles discussed. Dura was not made part of the Roman Empire until 164 CE, having previously been part of the Parthian empire, and, for a time, serving as the seat of the Parthian provincial governor. It would have experienced a much greater eastern cultural influence (like much of Syro-Mesopotamia) than Judaea. We are therefore looking at evidence quite temporally and culturally removed from Jesus and his contemporaries in order to determine their mode of dress. However, that there is as much of a representation of western-influenced dress as there is, certainly speaks to the prominence of this style across multiple regions and through varying cultures.\(^21\)

I do not believe that the presence of Parthian-Iranian dress, or the fact that the murals were painted in the third century, should diminish the strength of the combined evidence from Dura and the Cave of Letters to argue for Western influence in Jewish clothing of the first century, especially as additional textile remains continue to point towards Occidental modes of dress amongst the Eastern illustrated at Dura, constituted ‘Roman-style clothes’, but without clarification on what is meant by ‘Roman-style’ (and Shlezinger-Katsman makes no attempt in this regard), it is impossible to draw any conclusions. Dafna Shlezinger-Katsman, ‘Clothing’, in Catherine Hezser (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 362–81, at p. 368.


\(^{21}\) Goldman argues that in such a small city as Dura, there would not have been sufficient work for a painter to build a local trade and thus it is more likely that the individual who painted the synagogue murals was ‘most likely, [a] master painter … brought in from Palestine’. A number of interesting questions regarding cultural influence would follow such a conclusion such as: Is the dress representative of the painter’s experience, or did he fuse his own ideas with that of the synagogue’s congregation? The answers to such questions would add a new dynamic to the utilization of the Dura paintings in discussions of Jewish dress. Goldman,’Graeco-Roman Dress’, p. 167.
regions of the Roman Empire. Additionally, that we can see such strong similarities between the decoration painted at Dura and that found on textile remains indicates that the clothing in the paintings do represent clothing of the period.

In addition to the textile remains found in the Cave of Letters, other archaeological digs (at Masada, Qumran, Palmyra, Dura-Europos and Nahal Hever – the location of the Cave of Letters – and Nahal Mishmar; in Wadi Murabba’at and Wadi Daliya; and near Jericho) have uncovered hundreds of textile fragments, remnants of footwear (some more intact than others) and items of jewellery. These remains can further indicate fabric choice, colour and types of dyes used, weaving styles employed, religious regulatory adherence, and the influence of surrounding cultures, especially when fragments allow for a general reconstruction of the shape of the garment. Much of this evidence can be used to support Yadin’s conclusions that we have discussed. They also speak to the overall quality of the remains from the Cave of Letters in that nothing has since been discovered as intact or in as good a condition. In fact, they are some of the most complete textile remains of the period from anywhere within the bounds of the Roman Empire. It is easy to see then why Yadin believed they would ‘shed new light on the shapes and forms of clothing and other textiles in the Roman period in general [emphasis mine], and on Jewish dress in Mishnaic times in particular’.22 It is a shame that outside a small, interested academic circle, they do not appear to have done so yet.

Apart from the archaeological finds, there are also literary references to clothing and appearance that can be looked at. Those found in biblical texts tend to be regulatory in nature, focusing on issues of appearance (cf. Deut. 22.5; 1 Tim. 2.9; 1 Peter 3.3–4) or brief mentions within an unrelated discussion that can indicate minor details such as the type of garment or colour (most notably, 2 Tim. 4.13; also, Luke 8.44; John 19.2, 23). In addition, there are a few proscriptive passages found in the Hebrew Bible that describe either a particular garment – such as the sacral vestments of the High Priest Aaron, and his sons (Exod. 28, 39; Lev. 8.7-9)23 – or distinctive elements of Jewish dress applicable to many garments

23. These passages provide the greatest amount of detail of any textual evidence for dress and thus are very interesting to look at in comparison to film portrayals. As is called for in the Tanach, the high priest is often costumed with a breastplate, a turban or large hat, a long tunic and a sash, while the other members of the Sanhedrin are similarly styled (cf. The King of Kings (1927), Jesus Christ Superstar (1979), The Last Temptation of Christ (1988), The Passion of the Christ (2004)). However, the text specifies a vibrant colour palette (Exod. 28.6 calls for threads of gold, blue, purple and crimson, for example), and yet we primarily see the high priest in black and grey (as in The Greatest Story Ever Told, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, Jesus of Nazareth and The Bible Miniseries). It is also worth noting that throughout Exodus 28 and 39 the text specifies that these garments are only to be worn whilst officiating; in other words, in the Temple. Ezekiel 42.14; 44.19 makes this point especially clear, stating that the high priest shall wear his sacral vestments in the inner sanctum of the Temple alone, and remove them before he proceeds into the outer court.
(Deut. 22.11–12 as I have discussed at length). Taken in total, biblical references are minimal; rabbinic discussions of dress found within the Talmud provide our greatest collective resource. Thus Lucille Roussin, building on Yadin’s work, provides a good, if brief, comparative analysis between the evidence from the Mishnah, the Cave of Letters remains, and the murals at Dura. In ‘Costume in Roman Palestine, Archaeological Remains and the Evidence from the Mishnah’, Roussin draws attention to Talmudic passages that discuss what one could carry from a burning home on the Sabbath, or the appropriate method of undressing in a bathhouse, as both provide lists of typical clothing items. Though neither provides descriptions of what the clothing looked like, or how it was worn, by using Hebrew transliterations of Greek and Latin terms, they do ‘indicate that the basic items of clothing worn by Jews did not differ significantly from those worn by other inhabitants of the Graeco-Roman world’.24 If Jewish people wore distinctly different items of dress, Roussin argues, they would have had their own terminology.

The Talmud can also provide more indirect information on clothing and dress through, for example, stories about mistaken identity between Jews and Gentiles (implying a similarity in appearance),25 or Jews concealing their identity by adopting or neglecting small items of dress such as tzitzit or tefillin (also called ‘phylacteries’ – small leather boxes containing passages from the Torah strapped to a man’s head and arm for prayer). Similar examples of mistaken identity can be found in other Graeco-Roman texts of the time, or instances of Gentile leaders requiring Jews to wear something distinctive to mark themselves out. If they already looked distinctive, there would be no such need. Shaye Cohen collates a number of such texts highlighting the value not simply of texts that directly discuss clothing but of those whose overall discussions can imply something about dress. For example, Cohen states that in Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, ‘Trypho recognizes Justin immediately as a philosopher (because he is wearing the garb of a philosopher), but Justin has to ask Trypho “who are you”, because he is not identifiable as a ‘Hebrew’.26 In addition, Cohen points out that the absence

Unfortunately, whether the priests had special garments that they wore in public (such as presiding over a trial) is therefore unknown. For clothing worn by the priests in the Temple, see Joan E. Taylor, ‘Imagining Judean Priestly Dress: The Berne Josephus and Judaean Capta Coinage’, in Kristi Upson-Saia, Carly Daniel-Hughes and Alicia J. Batten (eds), Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 195–212.


26. Cohen also provides examples of a common aspect of later Jewish experience: the requirement in certain times that Jews wear particular items of dress in order to mark them
of texts discussing Jewish clothing at a time when the Greek and Romans liked to mock difference (and criticize those who adopted the clothing of ‘barbarous’ people such as the Celts, Germans, Parthians and Sarmatians) indicates that there was nothing distinctive about Jewish appearance.27 On the contrary, he writes, ‘there is much evidence that Jews, whether male or female, were not easily distinguished from gentiles.’28

When looked at collectively, the available evidence for the specific topic of ‘dress’ directs us to the same conclusions that scholars of the social world of the New Testament have long since drawn more generally: that the Jewish people of the Graeco-Roman world were a Hellenized society. As Martin Goodman has written, ‘How and why and to what extent Greek culture was absorbed into the ancient Jewish world is not always clear. But, that it was is undeniable.’29 We should be presenting these conclusions, particularly of Hellenistic dress normativity, visually in biblical dramas.

Despite the fact that Jesus is most commonly depicted in films wearing a tunic that descends to the ankles (or longer) and has long sleeves, in the first century both of these features were considered effeminate and therefore derided. When a man’s tunic of this style—long and with sleeves—was embroidered, it was only worn by ‘Roman dandies’.30 Wearing a tunic without a belt was punishment for a Roman soldier, and thought of as immoral in the individual. In fact, even though Julius Caesar wore a belt, he was criticized for wearing it too loosely. The long, long-sleeved tunic (sometimes unbelted, sometimes belted loosely) traditionally associated with Jesus, and thus first-century Jewish men’s dress, was not ‘accepted’ male fashion within the Roman Empire until the late fourth century or even the

out as Jews (linen, in Artapanus, frag. 3 parag. 20; an ivy motif, in 3 Maccabees 2.29), something that would not be necessary if they were already so marked by their own choice in appearance; Cohen, ‘Those Who Say They Are Jews’, p. 6. There is no evidence this was actually ever actualized, and Cohen notes that non-Jewish women, thought to be Jewish women, were seized in the Alexandrian riots (Philo, Against Flaccus 96), because Jewish and non-Jewish women could not be distinguished.

27. Balsdon gives a long list of occasions where Romans or Greeks wearing the clothing of an ‘other’, even each other, were heavily critiqued for doing so. In particular, the male Celts and Germans wore very thick, generally black cloaks and trousers appropriate for their cold, wet weather and suitable for riding horses. When Romans who ventured North into these regions adopted this dress (as it was no doubt practical to do so), they were criticized (cf. Cicero, Phil. 2, 76). It seems unlikely then that Jewish people could have worn thick black cloaks (cf. the Sanhedrin in The Passion of the Christ) with nary a mention by Greeks or Romans. J. P. V. D. Balsdon, Romans and Aliens (London: Duckworth, 1979), pp. 219–22.


fifth. Even then, this style of dress is found only on ecclesiastics or the wealthy, as in the mosaics of Ravenna. If the filmmaker’s goal is historical accuracy (as often professed), we should be seeing Jesus in a knee-length tunic (with clavi) tied at the waist, and a tallit that was not much longer than his tunic. Jesus would probably not have been able to afford fine linen, silk or rich dyes. It is more likely that he wore wool or natural linen. Jesus should not be in a fourth-century ankle-length, long-sleeved tunic. His tallit should not be long and voluminous, as he spent his days travelling and labouring, and this would have been highly impractical.

As for Caiaphas, a wealthy and powerful member of society, the Cave of Letters remains prove illuminating. Like Jesus, Caiaphas’ tunic should reach his knees and no longer. His tallit on the other hand, would demonstrate his wealth, and thus would likely be made from a very large piece of fine wool that would reach his ankles (the more cumbersome, the more it impeded one’s movement, the greater the show of status). It would have been richly coloured, and decorated with notched bands. He probably wrapped it in such a manner as to display the broad clavi on his tunic. And this, at long last, brings us to Brian.

31. For a good overview on Roman attitudes to impropriety in dress see Balsdon, Romans and Aliens, pp. 2, 220–1. Also, Jonathan Edmondson, ‘Public Dress and Social Control in Late Republican and Early Imperial Rome’, in Jonathan Edmondson and Alison Keith (eds), Roman Dress and the Fabrics of Roman Culture (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 21–46, at pp. 35–6.
32. For further detail on Jesus’ clothing, see Joan E. Taylor, ‘What Did Jesus Look Like?’ in The Life of Jesus of Nazareth (i5 Magazine special issue, 2014), pp.10–15.
33. For much of human history, even as fashions changed, impracticality in dress denoted a member of the ‘leisure class’, those who did not need to move much throughout the day, while an abundance of fabric was an overt display of wealth. In 1899, Thorstein Veblen wrote, ‘If, in addition to showing that the wearer can afford to consume freely and uneconomically, it can also be shown in the same stroke that he or she is not under the necessity of earning a livelihood … Our dress, therefore, in order to serve its purpose effectively, should not only be expensive, but it should also make plain to all observers that the wearer is not engaged in any kind of productive labor’: The Theory of the Leisure Class (London: Macmillan, 1899). Over time, the toga, in following this principal, became so unwieldy that it fell out of favour entirely. Shelley Stone, ‘The Toga: From National to Ceremonial Costume’, in Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante (eds), The World of Roman Costume (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), pp. 13–45, at p. 17. Similarly, the draping of a large himation to expose the shoulder made movement difficult and thus would likely have been avoided by labourers. Robin Osborne, The History Written on the Classical Greek Body (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 61–2. See also Malcolm Barnard, Fashion as Communication (New York: Routledge, 2002); Christopher Breward, The Culture of Fashion (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).
34. It is quite probable that Caiaphas and the other priests would have worn something that identified them to the public, such as a particular hat, white garments or specially
I’ve often said in conversation that the *Life of Brian* (1979) has the most historically accurate costumes of any Jesus film. Hazel Petheg, veteran Monty Python costume designer, clearly knew her craft. Nevertheless, it is entirely anachronistic to depict the crowds as a sea of beige-wearing Bedouin displaced into 1st-century Judaea that we see in nearly every biblical epic (Figure 16.1).35

There is no evidence to suggest, for example, that anybody in the ancient world, Jew or not, wore a *kaffiyeh* (a traditional Arabic head covering made from a square of cloth often held in place with rope).36 However, there are a few specific points on tailored garments, as other priests in the ancient world were known to have done so. For example, Egyptian priests of the Osiris cult were only permitted to wear linen (Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 352c–d). If this held true for priests of the Temple in Jerusalem, then it is less likely that their mantles bore decoration or were colourful. The picture I have drawn is one based on social status, wealth and degree of Hellenization therefore, and not on Caiaphas’ role as high priest, as we are unsure as to how this would have impacted his choice in clothing. However, it should not be assumed that priestly sacred vestments worn in the Temple precincts were worn outside it; see above n. 20.

35. Although Bedouin generally wear clothing dyed a multitude of colours, their style of clothing, including the *kaffiyah*, are what costume designers mistakenly tend to emulate. The fact that costumes veer towards beige and other ‘natural’ colours does not represent Bedouin-styling, but instead, other impressions of first-century Judaean clothing.

36. Exploration and conquest of the East in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought the West into greater contact with Bedouin tribes – often remarked upon as being true conservationists to an ancient way of life in contrast to the ‘degenerate’ city dwellers who represented the failing Ottoman Empire. The Arab and the Bedouin specifically became seen almost as a ‘living fossil’. In the newly developed field of race science, the Bedouin were
which *Life of Brian* favourably differs from standard depictions that are worth highlighting.

**Individuality**

Costume is used to great effect both to group people together and to tell them apart. While this can be a useful tool for the audience, it can prevent us from seeing people within a group as individuals. It also contributes to a more heightened sense of division between groups and like-mindedness within groups, than what might be indicated by narrative alone. In New Testament dramatizations, the traditional costuming of Pharisees and Temple priests in the same manner gives the impression that historically these two groups were one and the same; however, while some Pharisees might have been priests, most priests were not Pharisees; the Sadducees and Pharisees too were quite different groups, with their own distinctive concerns about Jesus’ teaching. The Pythons, on the other hand, managed to imbue a personality on many of the characters, even those in self-elected groups who chose to dress similarly. If dramatizations were to costume its characters with a greater variability, as in *Brian*, perhaps based on *social status* rather than on belief or disbelief in Jesus, we might be presented with a better picture of the social world of the New Testament.

**Social class**

In the ancient world, as in much of human history, clothing styles, fabrics and dyes ‘helped to underline the key hierarchical status layers into which [society] was divided’. That first-century Jews were no different is evidenced by the use of *clavi* of varying widths in the Cave of Letters remains, as well as certain colours of dye that are used more or less frequently than others. Jerusalem was a city with an aristocracy; the Sadducees; and an educated class as many of the Pharisees were, as seen as the most racially and culturally ‘pure’ Semites. And just as Hebrew and Aramaic were scientifically grouped together, so too were Jews and Arabs – the standard bearers for the Semitic peoples. The Jew was now no longer simply a theological or religious ‘other’ but a ‘racial’ other as well. At the same time, the Jewishness of Jesus, which was becoming an academic topic in its own right, could not be denied and thus he and his followers also took on a Bedouin look, and thus the *kaffiyeh* made its way into biblical dramatizations. Kalmar, ‘Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban’, p. 17.

37. By depicting them so differently to Jesus, it appears as if the Pharisees and Sadducees are in complete agreement and in total opposition to Jesus. Josephus makes it repeatedly clear in his writings that these two groups (a third being the Essenes) are distinctly different groups (*Antiquities* 13.171; *War* 2.119; *Vita* 7): The Sadducees appear to be from an aristocratic class (2 Chron. 31; Ezek. 40.46), while the Pharisees had ‘the multitude on their side’ (*Antiquities* 13.293).

well as many people of lower, labour-based classes. In the Sermon on the Mount scene in *Life of Brian*, one does not need to hear the characters’ English accents to know that we are looking at people from different social classes (Figure 16.2). Like *Ben-Hur*, the *Life of Brian* is one of the few New Testament films that alludes to the existence of a differentiated social hierarchy.

**Hellenization**

Not only does the Jerusalem of the Monty Python universe have social classes, but it is a world clearly touched by the Hellenistic and Roman Empires. Many of the characters wear knee-length tunics appropriate to the time, Brian wears a *petasos* (a Hellenistic sun hat known to have been worn by Jews, 2 Macc. 4.12) in the coliseum, and its wealthiest couple, adorned in jewellery, fine cloth and long garments, appears the most Hellenized (even whilst being crucified!). As we have seen from the historical evidence, this is how first-century Jews *should* appear.

**Pontius Pilate**

When a film about the life of Jesus claims historical accuracy, there is one simple litmus test that can be used: what does Pontius Pilate wear? By the late Republican/early Imperial period of Rome, fashion had become an incredibly important mechanism of social interactions. “The sheer comprehensiveness of the ancient scholarly literature on dress illustrates how deeply significant it was to the Roman
mentality.'39 What one wore and how it was worn was dictated by legislation, part of which included the requirement that all male citizens must wear the toga in any civic context, such as presiding over a trial as a representative of Rome. If Monty Python can get this right, so should any other film of this period, especially those that ask audiences to take them seriously.40

So, does it matter if anachronistic costuming taints the audience's knowledge or understanding of a particular period? I would imagine that many historians like myself would assert the importance of an accurate public awareness of the past, even if they have differing reasons for doing so. As to whether the responsibility for educating the public falls, even in part, on the film industry, is a question much more open to debate. We might begin to answer this question by asking another: When it comes to biblical epics, are audience expectations the same? Do they watch The Passion of the Christ with the same mindset as Gone with the Wind? Based on the public response to Mel Gibson's film in particular, from church screenings, to educational information distributed, a more likely answer would be that for many people, they are not simply seeing the past on screen for the purpose of entertainment, they are seeing a representation of a deeply held truth. Conversely, when a film does not appear to recognize this different standard, as in the case of the Life of Brian, some religious groups protest or censor it. Does this then change the film industry's level of responsibility? This, I believe, is a complex question best answered in another book.

For the purposes of this chapter, however, I will briefly argue for responsibility on the part of the film industry, though the degree depends on what it is that they are presenting and what message is coming across. I would not argue for, and I think one should never expect, a true facsimile of the clothing of the 1st century, or any period, on screen. However, it is important that the costuming accurately, or as accurately as possible, represents the historical context: The sense of the past, the feeling of the time should be presented appropriately, even if the clothing itself is not. It is here that the Life of Brian succeeds. Even though there were many inaccuracies in the costuming, visually the film presented a Jerusalem that was hot, crowded, lively, colourful (in some of its clothing and in its people), cosmopolitan and culturally influenced by having been part of both the Hellenistic and Roman empires.

40. It was quite reasonably suggested to me at the Jesus and Brian conference (20–22 June 2014), that since Pilate's position in Judaea was a military one, military garb would be appropriate. However, given its emblematic force . . . male citizens were . . . required to wear the toga for all civic occasions – political, judicial, and religious, Edmondson, 'Public Dress', p. 22. Or as Shelley Stone puts it: 'throughout the Empire . . . [the toga] was always considered the garment to be worn by the Roman man conducting public business', Stone, The World of Roman Costume, p. 13. If Pilate was indeed presiding over a public trial, surely a civic occasion, then he would have been required by Roman law to wear a toga whilst doing so.