

LORD RAGLAN'S HERO AND JESUS: A REBUTTAL  
TO METHODOLOGICALLY DUBIOUS USES  
OF THE RAGLAN ARCHETYPE

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There are numerous cases where archetypal patterns have been applied to Jesus, specifically in recent years. The dying-rising god has, despite its methodological shortcomings,<sup>1</sup> remained one such instance of an archetypal pattern that has been applied to Jesus.

A pattern which has likewise had some persistence is Lord Raglan's hero archetype, a twenty-two-point scale used to note common parallels in hero myths and folklore, which was introduced to the academic world in 1934.<sup>2</sup> Originally it was not necessarily intended to show whether or not the figures it categorized were historical or ahistorical, but instead served Lord Raglan's purpose of noting the commonalities in how myths and legends developed, which he argued was based in ritual. Lord Raglan's work has since been widely dismissed by folklorists and mythologists.<sup>3</sup> However, where it has seen a lasting impact is in historical Jesus studies, largely

1. Jonathan Z. Smith, 'Dying and Rising Gods', in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (16 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1987), IV, pp. 521-27; Mark S. Smith, 'The Death of "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Biblical World: An Update, with Special Reference to Baal in the Baal Cycle', *SJOT* 12 (1998), pp. 257-313; Nicolas Wyatt, 'The Problem of "Dying and Rising" Gods: The Case of Baal', *UF* 48 (2017), pp. 819-45.

2. Lord Raglan, 'The Hero of Tradition', *Folklore* 45 (1934), pp. 212-31.

3. Alan Dundes, *Interpreting Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 223-61 (231); Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt, *American Folklore Scholarship: A Dialogue of Dissent* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 125-27.

starting with the work of Alan Dundes. Dundes, by using a myriad of biblical sources, argued that Jesus fit at least seventeen points on the scale, making him a high-ranking Raglan hero. This has since been followed up by other scholars. However, none have been more persistent than those who attempt to argue that Jesus did not exist as a historical figure (i.e. mythicists).<sup>4</sup> Those who have done so through conventional academic literature are Robert M. Price, Richard Carrier and most recently Raphael Lastaster (following Carrier). All three figures use the Raglan Hero pattern—or a variant of it—as a part of their arguments that Jesus likely did not exist. Price argues that the archetype indicates that Jesus’ narrative is entirely mythologically framed, while Carrier and Lastaster use it as their Bayesian reference class, from which they develop a prior probability regarding whether or not Jesus existed.

4. Recent academic mythicist and agnostic works include Yan Changyou, ‘Yesu—chuanshuo zhong de xugou renwu’, *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 2 (1983), pp. 122-28; Iosif Aronovic Kryvelev, *Christ: Myth or Reality?* (Moscow: USSR Academy of Sciences, ‘Social Sciences Today’, 1987); Jean Magne, *From Christianity to Gnosis and from Gnosis to Christianity: An Itinerary through the Texts to and from the Tree of Paradise* (BJS, 286; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2000); Tom Harpur, *The Pagan Christ: Recovering the Lost Light* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2004); Arthur Droge, ‘Jesus and Ned Ludd: What’s in a Name?’, *Caesar: A Journal for the Critical Study of Religion and Human Values* 3.1 (2009), pp. 23-25; Thomas L. Brodie, *Beyond the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Memoir of a Discovery* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012); Richard Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014); Llogarí Pujol Boix, *Érase una vez ... Jesús, el egipcio: Las fuentes egipcias del Nuevo Testamento Setme II* (Barcelona: Ediciones de La Tempestad, 2015); Norman Simms, ‘Jesus the Jew: Who Says So?’, in Zev Garber (ed.), *Teaching the Historical Jesus* (Routledge Studies in Religion, 42; London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 121-32; Hermann Detering, *Buddha, Josua, Jesus und der Weg Zum Anderen Ufer: Die Gnostische Interpretation des Exodus und die Anfänge des Josua-Jesus-Kultes* (n.p., 2018); Nicholas Peter Legh Allen, *Christian Forgery in Jewish Antiquities: Josephus Interrupted* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020); Raphael Lastaster, *Questioning the Historicity of Jesus: Why a Philosophical Analysis Elucidates the Historical Discourse* (Value Inquiry Book Series, 336; Leiden: Brill, 2019).

Despite the debate on Jesus' historicity having resulted in numerous rebuttals to these mythicists and agnostics,<sup>5</sup> there has been rather little

5. For the most notable, see Hu Yutang, 'Lishi shang de Yesu', *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 1 (1981), pp. 84-100; James D.G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1985); R.T. France, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1986); Morton Smith, 'The Historical Jesus', in R. Joseph Hoffmann and Gerald A. Larue (eds.), *Jesus in History and Myth* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1986), pp. 47-53; Ian Wilson, *Jesus: The Evidence* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 51-65; Alena Frolíková, 'Pochybovalo se v antice o historičnosti Ježiše', in Alena Frolíková and J. Janda (eds.), *Přispěvky k dějinám křesťanství* (Prague: Ústav pro klasická studia ČSAV, 1991), pp. 37-46; Tang Yi (ed.), *Jidujiao shi* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1993), p. 25; Murray J. Harris, *Three Crucial Questions about Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), pp. 13-29; Edwin Yamauchi, 'Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?', in Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland (eds.), *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), pp. 207-29; Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), pp. 27-46, 143-257; Tom Mongar, *Only with Marx and Jesus* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), pp. 3-7; Valerie Abrahamsen, 'The Jesus Myth according to Barbara Walker', *Journal of Higher Criticism* 5 (1998), pp. 188-202; Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), pp. 90-124; Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Studying the Historical Jesus; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Stanley E. Porter and Stephen J. Bedard, *Unmasking the Pagan Christ: An Evangelical Response to the Cosmic Christ Idea* (Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2006); Gordon L. Heath, 'Neither Scholarly nor a Solution: A Response to Tom Harpur's *The Pagan Christ*', *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 6 (2003-2005), pp. 126-53; Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Antonio Piñero (ed.), *¿Existió Jesús realmente? El Jesús de la historia a debate* (Madrid: Editorial Raíces, 2008); James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (eds.), *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* (Spectrum Multiviews Book Series; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009); Stephen J. Bedard, 'Methodological Problems with the Jesus Myth Hypothesis', *Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics* 3 (2010), pp. 57-66; *idem*, 'Exposing the Spirit of the Age: Responding to the Zeitgeist Movie', *Hope's Reason* 1.1 (2010), pp. 145-68; Ronald Huggins, 'Kersey Graves's Sixteen Crucified Saviors: Prometheus as Test Case', *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 10 (2011),

scholarship done that offers comprehensive critiques of the methodologies used to assess whether or not Jesus actually existed.<sup>6</sup> As a result, issues like the Raglan archetype have been left, to some extent, without much examination. This means that there are methods in play which have not fully been tested or evaluated regarding whether they can withstand careful scrutiny. The present study attempts to resolve part of this issue by giving a close

pp. 145-65; Samuel Byrskog, 'The Historicity of Jesus: How Do We Know that Jesus Existed?', in Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2011), III, pp. 2183-211; Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012); Amanda Witmer, 'Jesus, the Gospels and History', *The Bible and Interpretation*, <http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/2013/08/wit378008.shtml>; Christopher Winchester, 'Did Jesus Even Exist? The Problematic Argument from Silence', *Hope's Reason* 4.1 (2013), n.p.; David Neal Greenwood, 'The *Alethes Logos* of Celsus and the Historicity of Christ', *ATR* 96 (2014), pp. 705-13; Robert Greg Cavin and Carlos A. Colombetti, 'Evidence, Miracles, and the Existence of Jesus: Comments on Stephen Law', *Faith and Philosophy* 31 (2014), pp. 204-16; Maurice Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myth?* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2014); Christina Petterson, review of *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), by Richard Carrier, in *Relegere* 5 (2015), pp. 253-58; Josiah Batten, 'Bayesian Reasoning and Jesus Mythicism: Responding to Raphael Lataster', *Hope's Reason* 5.1 (2015), n.p.; Gerd Theissen, 'What Can We Know of Jesus and His Activities?—Arguments for the Historicity of Jesus', *Jesus Aboensis* 2 (2017), pp. 34-50; Daniel N. Gullotta, 'On Richard Carrier's Doubts: A Response to Richard Carrier's "On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt"', *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 15 (2017), pp. 310-46; Simon Gathercole, 'The Historical and Human Existence of Jesus in Paul's Letters', *JSHJ* 16 (2018), pp. 183-212; Antonio Piñero, *Aproximación al Jesús histórico* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 3rd edn, 2019); Hyekyoung Song, 'The Historicity of Jesus and the Potential Resource of the Apocryphal Gospel', *Catholic Theology and Thought* 82 (2019), pp. 107-50; Stephen E. Thompson, *Ancient Egypt: Facts and Fiction* (Historical Facts and Fictions; Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2020), pp. 193-223.

6. Some exceptions are Raphael Lataster, 'Bayesian Reasoning: Criticising the "Criteria of Authenticity" and Calling for a Review of Biblical Criticism', *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in Social Sciences* 5 (2015), pp. 271-93; Justin J. Meggitt, "'More Ingenious than Learned'? Examining the Quest for the Non-Historical Jesus', *NTS* 65 (2019), pp. 443-60.

rebuttal to the usage of the Raglan archetype as a method of assessing Jesus' historicity.

*The Archetype in Current Literature on Jesus*

The Raglan hero archetype was published in 1934 in a classic study entitled 'The Hero'. In this, he lists the following scale of items that are usually a part of the 'hero's' biography:<sup>7</sup>

- (1) The Hero's mother is a royal virgin
- (2) Father is a king
- (3) Father is often a near relative of the mother
- (4) There is an unusual conception
- (5) Hero is said to be the son of a deity
- (6) There is an attempt to kill the Hero as an infant, often by father or grandfather
- (7) Hero is spirited away
- (8) Reared by a foster family in a far-off country
- (9) No details remain of childhood
- (10) Returns or goes to his future kingdom
- (11) He is the victor over a king, giant, dragon, or wild beast
- (12) Marries a princess, often related to his predecessor
- (13) Becomes King
- (14) For a time, he rules uneventfully
- (15) He prescribes laws
- (16) He loses favor with the gods or his subjects
- (17) Driven from throne and city
- (18) Meets a mysterious death
- (19) This occurs often at the top of a hill
- (20) His children, if there are any, do not succeed him
- (21) His body is not buried
- (22) Has one or more holy sepulchers or tombs

7. Lord Raglan, 'The Hero', in *In Quest of the Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 137-47 (138).

If one were to combine all of the biographical data about Jesus from the Gospels and Paul into one conglomerate source, one could see how he could possibly obtain a high score on this list. Alan Dundes gave him a total score of seventeen as a result of this procedure.<sup>8</sup> Of course, these findings have been less than consistent and, as I will note below, demonstrate a rather large flaw in the usefulness of this archetype.

On the other hand, the mythicists who use this archetype for Jesus have to make a number of problematic leaps. To demonstrate what is done in Carrier's work (though this argument also occurs in Lataster and Price), I will show his list (note that Carrier shifts points 3, 11 and 12 into positions 21, 20 and 22 respectively).<sup>9</sup>

- (1) The Hero's mother is a virgin [omission of royalty]
- (2) His father is king or heir of a king [addition of heritage]
- (3) The circumstances of his conception are unusual
- (4) He is reputed to be the son of a god
- (5) An attempt is made to kill him when he is a baby [omits family relation]
- (6) He is spirited away from those trying to kill him at birth
- (7) He is reared in a foreign country by one or more foster parents [alters to 'one or more' foster parents]
- (8) We are told nothing of his childhood
- (9) Upon reaching manhood he returns to his future kingdom
- (10) He is crowned, hailed or becomes king [altered from 'becomes king' with additions]
- (11) He reigns uneventfully (i.e. without wars or national catastrophes)
- (12) He prescribes laws
- (13) He then loses favor with the gods or his subjects

8. Alan Dundes, 'The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus', in *Protocol of the 25th Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Cultures* (Berkeley: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Cultures, 1977), pp. 1-32.

9. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, pp. 229-30. Carrier discusses that he did this because he was getting different numerical counts on various figures than Raglan did and that generalizing further would allow for more historical persons to score over half. See Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, pp. 230-31 n. 191.

- (14) He is driven from his throne or city [altered conjunction from 'and' to 'or']
- (15) He is met by a mysterious death
- (16) He dies atop a hill or high place
- (17) His children, if any, do not succeed him
- (18) His body turns up missing [altered from 'He is not buried']
- (19) Yet he still has one or more holy sepulchers (in fact or fiction)
- (20) Before taking a throne or a wife, he battles and defeats a great adversary (such as a king, giant, dragon or wild beast) [altered from battling either one of those four]
- (21) His parents are related to each other
- (22) He marries a queen or princess related to his predecessor [altered with addition of queen]

As one can see, there are numerous alterations that Carrier makes to the ranking, which ultimately provide him with a more *generalistic* outline to work with, not a more concrete one. Carrier, using this as his outline and the Gospel of Matthew as his source, scores Jesus at twenty out of twenty-two points on the scale. He then tries to argue that if one argues allegorically that Jesus scores (22), he may then score as many as Oedipus at twenty-one (Oedipus being the highest scored figure by Raglan and Carrier, before Jesus, at twenty-one). Price, on the other hand, scores Jesus at nineteen, also by altering some points (especially 6) and applying others quite loosely, which I shall discuss below.<sup>10</sup>

Since, according to Carrier,<sup>11</sup> figures that score twelve points or higher are generally mythical figures, one can assemble a prior probability of Jesus existing based on how he scores. In effect, if Jesus scores twelve points or higher on the Raglan hero archetype, then he gains a prior probability of being less likely to be historical. Carrier achieves this conclusion by working purely with the rankings of Raglan, and he comes to a prior probability of around 33 per cent or 1/3 that Jesus was historical (note that this is not the total probability).<sup>12</sup> From the standpoint of working exclusively with what Raglan provides, one can certainly see how such a conclusion is, at least,

10. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus*, p. 259.

11. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, p. 229.

12. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, p. 252.

tenable. If roughly only 1/3 of historical persons who are legendarized become Raglan heroes, then it follows that if Jesus is a Raglan hero, then he has a prior probability of 1/3 or 33 per cent. Lataster follows Carrier's conclusions closely.<sup>13</sup> However, the issue is how much data is actually being included to make this calculation.

It is my contention that Carrier's case for this final outcome according to Raglan's hero archetype is, in effect, based on fallacious grounds, specifically a *selection bias*. In what follows, I will note the numerous methodological problems I see with Carrier and company's usage of the Raglan archetype, and how they ultimately rely on questionable methods in order to make such calculations and scorings even work, which undermine their entire case.

### *The Problem of Selection Bias*

In Carrier's work, he only makes use of the examples which Raglan used, e.g. Zeus, Osiris, Oedipus, etc.<sup>14</sup> This grants him only fifteen figures that he is working with to make his case, and as such, he has a rather small sample size with which to make it. From such a small sample, one may be inclined to think that Carrier's case is, in fact, biased from the start because he makes use of only well-known mythical figures.

Carrier briefly entertains Alexander the Great and Mithridates by arguing that they each only score ten points in total.<sup>15</sup> But is this actually the case? Carrier argues they can only be scored higher by 'an inappropriately loose assignment of criteria'.<sup>16</sup> However, I think that this can be demonstrated to be exactly what Carrier does in order to score Jesus as high as twenty based on the Gospel of Matthew. Let us begin first with the issue of whether or not Jesus actually satisfies the points in question.

Carrier clearly has no issue with adjusting the archetype—at times quite drastically—in order to make it more general and fit his desired outcome for Jesus. For example (and I am using Carrier's version of the archetype here), Mary now fits because no longer is royalty required (1). Likewise, Joseph

13. Lataster, *Questioning the Historicity of Jesus*, pp. 384-87.

14. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, p. 231.

15. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, pp. 231-32 n. 193.

16. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, p. 232 n. 193.



now fits because Carrier added a section that allows for 'heirs' to be included (2). This same issue is how Carrier force-fits Jesus into points 7, 10, 14 and 20. Jesus can now be labeled 'king' because Carrier adds in 'crowned, hailed or becomes king' by altering Raglan's original point. Of course, here is where things get even more problematic. Because Carrier alters these points, some of the points which he does not alter no longer apply to Jesus. For instance, despite the fact that Jesus never actually becomes a king and, thus, is never able to rule, Carrier still grants him 9, 11 and 13. If Jesus never ruled, how could he have a kingdom?<sup>17</sup> If Jesus never ruled, how did he 'reign uneventfully'? If Jesus never ruled, how did he have subjects to lose favor with him (which must be the case, as God does not)? Of course, whether Jesus qualifies as even 'hailed as king' is questionable since only the Romans explicitly do this in mockery of him.<sup>18</sup> Carrier never explains his reasoning here but attributes these points to Jesus blanketly without proper analysis. Perhaps this is why more recent scholarship on this issue has granted Jesus scores below ten.<sup>19</sup>

As such, one can clearly demonstrate that in Carrier's own case, he has absolutely no issue with stretching the scale to the point of logical incoherence in order to fit Jesus. As such, maybe we should look back at whether or not Mithridates of Pontus and Alexander the Great actually do qualify, as it would seem as though if we used Carrier's same looseness and inconsistency, they most certainly could. In a recent work on Mithridates IV, Adrienne Mayor notes that Mithridates, with some stretches, can fit all twenty-two points of the Raglan archetype.<sup>20</sup> I personally consider some of them too stretched to be upheld, but the following still hold (using the original Raglan archetype here): (1) His mother was a royal virgin (Raglan included Romulus's mother who always has sexual intercourse in the narratives); (2) his father was a king; (3) they were probably related, given the intermarriages of their ruling families; (5) he was reputed to be the son of a god; (6) there was

17. Note that Jn 18.36 rejects Jesus as ruling earth, saying 'my kingdom is not of this world' (author's translation).

18. Matthew 27.37.

19. James McGrath, 'Rankled by Wrangling over Rank-Raglan Rankings: Jesus and the Mythic Hero Archetype', *Bible and Interpretation* (2014), <https://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/2014/12/mcg388023.shtml>.

20. Adrienne Mayor, *The Poison King: The Life and Legend of Mithradates, Rome's Deadliest Enemy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 371-73.

an attempt to kill him at birth; (7) the attempt on his life meant that as a child he had to flee for several years; (8) he was raised in the countryside by foster parents who farmed; (9) virtually no details exist of his childhood; (10) upon adulthood he returned to his kingdom; (11) he had victory over powerful enemies/great adversary; (12) he married Princess Laodice; (13) he became king; (14) the first decade of his reign was peaceful (i.e. uneventful); (15) he prescribed laws as king; (16) he lost favor with the gods, as omens predicted, and heavy losses led to him losing favor with his subjects and allies; (17) he was forced to flee from his throne and his kingdom entirely; (19) he died in a tower or high place; (20) his children did not succeed him as the Romans took over and made his kingdom a client state; (22) multiple places are associated with his burial. The only points which Mithridates IV does not seem to fit from this blanket reading are: an unusual birth (4), unusual or mysterious death (18) and that his body was not buried (21).

However, one could actually grant at least 18 and 21 based on Carrier's standards. The reason is that Carrier actually grants these to Jesus, despite the fact that crucifixion was a common and non-mysterious way to die in the ancient Roman world,<sup>21</sup> and that Jesus was actually buried, which means that he flat out does not fit the score of 21. Of course, Carrier is able to bypass 21 by simply altering it from the body not being buried, to the body turning up missing. However, this can then be applied to Mithridates IV, because sources are actually confused on where he was buried and, thus, his body was missing.<sup>22</sup> As such, Mithridates, using Carrier's own standards of application (and in fact, using the far stricter Raglan archetype, and not Carrier's altered form) can fit at least nineteen points on the scale. With Carrier's same looseness applied, he would score twenty-one (i.e. one higher than Jesus does and the same as Oedipus).

Rönblom uses a more skeptical and cautious approach to Alexander the Great, who scores a minimum of thirteen points.<sup>23</sup> Of course, since Carrier uses extremely loose methods, the score could be increased to as high as fourteen in my estimation. This is because Rönblom assigns half points

21. See Josephus, *War* 5.11; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44, 60. See also John Granger Cook, *Crucifixion in the Mediterranean World* (WUNT, 327; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2nd edn, 2019).

22. Mayor, *The Poison King*, p. 373.

23. Johan Rönblom, 'Is Jesus a Rank-Raglan Hero', *Johan Rönblom's Blog* (2014), <http://ronblom.net/is-jesus-a-rank-raglan-hero/>.

instead of full-points, unlike Carrier. If full points are used, Alexander would naturally score a point higher. On the converse, Rönnblom scores Jesus at eight and a half points, contradicting Carrier. This aligns far more closely with what New Testament scholars have done on this issue, such as James McGrath.<sup>24</sup> But these are not the only figures. Incidentally, Carrier did not explore modern religions or folklore, which I shall do here.

For example, Raymond Howard-Lear (aka 'Lord Rayel') is a modern religious leader who claims to be the second coming of Jesus, and he has actual believers who think so as well. Since this is the case, Howard-Lear scores every single point that Jesus does (in fact, one could argue that he meets certain criteria on this scale more than just once). Thus, if we go with Carrier's scoring, he hits twenty points; if we go with Dundes, he hits seventeen; and if we go with Rönnblom he scores eight and a half. As such, we have another possible Raglan hero *who is currently alive!* General Custer has been noted by American folklorists to score at least fourteen points on the scale.<sup>25</sup> Utley has shown that Abraham Lincoln, through folklore biographies, scores all twenty-two points on the scale exactly.<sup>26</sup> John F. Kennedy can be demonstrated to score at least fifteen through African-American

24. McGrath, 'Rankled by Wrangling', scores Jesus at nine points; David Marshall, *Jesus is no Myth! The Fingerprints of God on the Gospels* (Seattle, WA: Kuai Mu, 2016), pp. 28-41 places him between six and eight; Stephen Bedard, 'The Historical Jesus and the Raglan Scale', *Stephen J. Bedard* (2013), <http://www.stephenjbedard.com/2013/05/06/the-historical-jesus-and-the-raglan-scale/> scores Jesus at six; Morton Smith, 'Response', in *Protocol of the 25th Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Cultures* (Berkeley: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Cultures, 1977), pp. 62-63 and Mary P. Coote, 'Response', in *The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, Colloquy 25* (Berkeley: University of California and Graduate Theological Union, 1977), pp. 42-44 note that Jesus could score as low as ten.

25. Brian W. Dippe, *Custer's Last Stand: The Anatomy of an American Myth* (Lincoln: Bison Books, 1994), p. 173. In Bruce A. Rosenberg, *Custer and the Epic of Defeat* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), pp. 279-81, Custer is given an even higher score of 16 points.

26. Francis Lee Utley, *Lincoln Wasn't There or Lord Raglan's Hero* (CEA Chap Book; Washington, DC: College English Association, 1965).

folklore.<sup>27</sup> In addition, other scholars have shown that Joan of Arc, Nefertiti and Cleopatra all score thirteen points.<sup>28</sup> Tzar Nicholas II scores a total of fourteen.<sup>29</sup> Historical saints, like Saint Patrick, Saint Cadoc and Saint David of Wales score fifteen, sixteen and seventeen points respectively.<sup>30</sup> Using Carrier's version, Confucius satisfies the following: (1) his mother was a virgin who prays and has a child; (2) his father was a descendant of the Shang dynasty; (3) his mother prayed to Ni and had a child as a result of this; (4) the child is a result of his human mother and the divine Ni; (8) there are almost no details of his childhood; (9-10) he served as a leader in Lu from which he was exiled and had to return for some time; (11) he would have reigned uneventfully until the third year and his exile; (12) he prescribed laws; (14) as noted, he was driven from Lu; (17) his children did not succeed him; (19) he has a tomb in Qufu; (20) he battled with a great adversary.<sup>31</sup> As such, Confucius aligns with the hero pattern with at least thirteen points.

I will perform three others myself, to demonstrate that historical figures do regularly become Raglan heroes, and the results can be somewhat intriguing. For this I will look at David Koresh, Haile Selassie and Apollonius of Tyana respectively, which should further illuminate the issues we see with the hero pattern.

27. Guido van Rijn, *Kennedy's Blues: African-American Blues and Gospel Songs on JFK* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), pp. 11-17.

28. See respectively: Mariah Sexton, 'Joan of Arc as a Hero', *Female Candidates for the Hero Pattern* (n.d.), <https://department.monm.edu/classics/courses/clas230/MythDocuments/HeroPattern/JoanofArc.html>; Sreeju Kartha, 'Candidate for Heroine: Queen Nefertiti (1367-1343 B.C.E.)', *Female Candidates for the Hero Pattern* (1999), <https://department.monm.edu/classics/courses/clas230/MythDocuments/HeroPattern/Nefertiti.html>; Dara Pagel, 'The Pattern of a Hero Applied to Cleopatra VII', *Female Candidates for the Hero Pattern* (n.d.), <https://department.monm.edu/classics/courses/clas230/MythDocuments/Cleopatra.htm>.

29. Thomas J. Sienkewicz, 'Nicholas II, Tsar of all the Russias', *The Hero Pattern* (n.d.), <https://department.monm.edu/classics/courses/clas230/MythDocuments/HeroPattern/NicholasII%20Pattern.htm>.

30. Alwyn D. Rees, 'The Divine Hero in Celtic Hagiology', *Folklore* 47 (1936), pp. 30-41.

31. Robert G. Hendricks, 'The Hero Pattern and the Life of Confucius', *Journal of Chinese Studies* 1 (1984), pp. 241-60.

David Koresh attains the following score (using Carrier's version of the archetype):<sup>32</sup> (2) he is believed to be descended from David; thus, his father is heir of a king; (4) he was the reputed son of God; (7) he was raised by his grandmother, and later by his stepfather, after his mother left him at the age of four, only to return when he was seven; (9) upon manhood he moved to Waco, Texas and the Branch Davidians; (10) he was hailed as king by his followers; (11) he reigned uneventfully for a time (like Jesus); (12) he prescribed rules for his compound; (13) several of his subjects abandoned him at the compound; (14) he was driven out of the rest of the Davidians early on; (15) he met a mysterious death (the cause of the death and events surrounding it are still hotly debated); (17) his children perished and did not succeed him; (19) he has two shrines to his death: a grave and memorial; (20) before taking his throne, he battled for control of his Davidian sect and won. Without much effort, Koresh scores thirteen points on the scale and is therefore a Raglan hero that Carrier overlooked.

Haile Selassie is another Raglan hero. Edmund Standing had previously written on this figure and noted how legendized his life is, and I shall rely primarily on Standing's work here to score Selassie (specifically using the Raglan archetype):<sup>33</sup> (2) his father was the heir of the king; (4) he had an unusual conception accompanied by star alignment; (5) he was reputed to be son of God; (11) he came out victorious over fascist Italy (i.e. his 'great adversary'); (12) he married a princess; (13) he became the king; (14) he prescribed laws; (16) he lost favor with his subjects and was imprisoned; (17) he was driven from his throne; (18) he met a mysterious death according to legend; (20) his children did not succeed him, as the monarchy was abolished and his son was only emperor 'in exile'; (21) many believe his body was not buried; (22) he still has a tomb. Thus, Selassie scores at least thirteen points on this scale.

I will demonstrate one last example, one more closely related to Jesus and ancient Rome: Apollonius of Tyana. Virtually every scholar, save Robert Price, would acknowledge that Apollonius of Tyana existed and was

32. For the information here, see Colin Wilson, *The Devil's Party: A History of Charlatan Messiahs* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000); Bonnie Haldeman and Catherine Wessinger, *Memories of the Branch Davidians: The Autobiography of David Koresh's Mother* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007).

33. Edmund Standing, 'Against Mythicism: A Case for the Plausibility of a Historical Jesus', *Think* 9.24 (2010), pp. 13-27.

a historical figure.<sup>34</sup> For this, I will work from the *Life of Apollonius (Vita Apollonii)* by Philostratus, and we will see how many points he scores on Carrier's scale: (2) his father was descended of the first settlers of Tyana and a high aristocrat (*Vit. Apoll.* 1.4); (3) the circumstances of his birth are strange (*Vit. Apoll.* 1.4-5); (4) he was reputed to be the son of Zeus (*Vit. Apoll.* 1.6); (7) he was reared in two cities, neither of which was his home, by his adoptive father of the same name (*Vit. Apoll.* 1.7); (9) after his adoptive father's death, he returned to Tyana, his 'kingdom' (*Vit. Apoll.* 1.13); (11) he reigned uneventfully for a time; (12) he prescribed many laws and teachings in the Pythagorean tradition; (13) in one tradition he upsets those who had respected him and is threatened with death by dogs upon approaching a temple (*Vit. Apoll.* 8.30); (15) according to some traditions, he met a mysterious death (*Vit. Apoll.* 8.30); (17) he has no children; (18) in one tradition he vanished in the temple of Athena (*Vit. Apoll.* 8.30); (19) there is a tomb that is said to have received him despite being attributed to Apollonius at a later date.<sup>35</sup> Apollonius thus meets at least twelve points on the scale without issue, and likely would receive more under closer scrutiny.

All of this demonstrates a particular problem with Carrier's entire thesis. Historical figures regularly become Raglan heroes. They often score twelve or more points on the Raglan archetype. As a result, we can ostensibly say that Carrier's supposition that Jesus would only have a 33 per cent prior probability of being historical is fallacious. Carrier should have figured in at least these seventeen figures which I have noted here, all of whom were historical. It is informed, not by careful analysis of the data, but in fact by a selection bias. But this is not the only issue we have observed here either.

#### *The Issue of Application and Sources*

As we have noted, one major methodological problem is with Carrier's data that he uses to produce his prior probability. We can now move on to another element which is equally problematic, namely the issue of consistently applying points to Jesus.

34. Robert M. Price, 'Was There a Historical Apollonius of Tyana?', *Journal of Higher Criticism* 13 (2018), pp. 4-40.

35. Miroslav Marcovich, 'The Epigram on Apollonius of Tyana', *ZPE* 45 (1982), pp. 263-65.

As has been noted before, the issue of what points Jesus scores and does not is actually far from agreed upon. The first major application of the Raglan hero pattern to Jesus was by folklorist Alan Dundes, who scored Jesus with a large seventeen points in totality, which Richard Miller appears to agree with.<sup>36</sup> In contradiction, Mary Coote and Morton Smith contest that Jesus could be as low as ten.<sup>37</sup> Price scores Jesus at nineteen points.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile other New Testament scholars and theologians have variously rated Jesus. McGrath scores him at nine points, David Marshall scores him between six and eight and Stephen Bedard at six.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, as noted before, the cautious Rönnblom grants him eight and a half.<sup>40</sup> Lataster and Carrier both score him at twenty, with allegorical and other source arguments that could result in a score of twenty-one to twenty-two.<sup>41</sup>

With such absolute inconsistency, one may wonder why it is the case that Jesus cannot score anything remotely resembling a stable record on the pattern, especially since the academics placing Jesus at these various scores are of differing religious, ethnic and political backgrounds, ruling out potential sociological overlap from the authors. It is my contention that the reasoning for this is based on the fact that the archetype is something which we must imprint on our sources and, as such, is a form of projection. This means that it also carries various agendas with it at times.

Carrier's main goal has been to establish that Jesus likely did not exist as a historical person. Consequently, the Raglan hero pattern functions as a reference class for his analysis, which sets up a prior probability that Jesus likely did not exist. When one then looks at Carrier's applications and alterations to the pattern, one sees very clearly that there appears to be projection of Carrier's agenda on the sources. To illustrate this, I will go through the Gospel of Matthew and demonstrate that the Gospel does not grant Jesus

36. Dundes, 'The Hero Pattern', pp. 1-32; Richard C. Miller, *Resurrection and Reception in Early Christianity* (Routledge Studies in Religion, 44; London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 104-105.

37. Smith, 'Response', pp. 62-63; Coote, 'Response', pp. 42-44.

38. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus*, p. 259.

39. McGrath, 'Rankled by Wrangling'; Marshall, *Jesus is no Myth!*, pp. 28-41; Bedard, 'The Historical Jesus and the Raglan Scale'.

40. Rönnblom, 'Is Jesus a Rank-Raglan Hero'.

41. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, pp. 232-34; Lataster, *Questioning the Historicity of Jesus*, pp. 384-87.

twenty points, even according to Carrier's archetype. Those with (+) are points Jesus scores and (-) are those he does not.

(+1) It is stated that Jesus is the son of a virgin; (-2) since there is no Davidic kingship, there is nothing that Joseph is actually the heir of, meaning Jesus is not the heir of a king, just a mere descendant of one; (+3) the circumstances of his birth are unusual; (+/-4) in the Gospel of Matthew, it is implied that he is the son of God through his conception; (+5) Herod tries to kill him as a babe; (+6) he is spirited away to Egypt; (+/-7) he is raised in Egypt for a time (however, this counts as only a half point since it is highly unlikely that Joseph would qualify as a foster parent); (+8) we are told little to nothing of his childhood; (-9) he is never declared or hailed as a king, nor does he claim to have ancient Palestine as his kingdom in Matthew; (-10) he is not hailed as a king except as a polemic against him (Mt. 27.37), and in a non-literal way by the magi (Mt. 2.1-12); (-11) he never rules; (+12) he prescribes laws; (-13) he never has subjects, nor does he lose favor with God; (-14) he has no throne, and while several cities reject him, none drive him out of their boundaries in Matthew; (-15) crucifixion is not a mysterious death; (+16) he dies atop of a hill; (+17) he has no children; (+18) his body turns up missing; (+19) he has one or more holy tombs; (-20) he never fights a great adversary, and the temptation in the wilderness entirely fails to satisfy this point, as Jesus' great adversary in Matthew is not Satan but the leadership of Israel (furthermore, there is no battle, and it is merely a show of Jesus' incorruptibility [Mt. 4.1-11]); (-21) his parents are never stated to be related; (-22) he never marries. As such, if one uses a strict ruling on this pattern, even on Carrier's exceptionally generalized variant, Jesus scores just ten and twelve points (depending on the scholar's subjective opinions on 4, since Jesus is not explicitly heralded the son of God in Matthew, and on 7, since considering Joseph a 'foster parent' is debatable) on the scale using the Gospel of Matthew as the source. If I were generous, I would grant 4 and give Jesus the 'son of God' title in Matthew (even though Raglan's and Carrier's archetypes both have the caveat of 'reputed' to be the son of God, which Jesus is not explicitly in the text). However, this would still bring him one point shy of Carrier's desired twelve points to be on the wrong side of the Raglan pattern for Carrier's prior probability of Jesus' historicity at 1/3 or 33 per cent.

This means that Carrier, Price, Dundes and others would likely be incorrect on the basis of Matthew. The score does not increase if applied to the other Gospels, either. The Gospel of Mark has nothing in regard to 1-7 and



as such, Jesus does not satisfy any of them. He does satisfy 8, but not 9-11. He satisfies 12, but not 13-15. He meets the criteria for 16-19, but not 20-22. As such, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus only scores six points on the entire scale. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus would satisfy points 1, 3, 4, 12, 14,<sup>42</sup> 16, 17, 18 and 19, or nine in total. His father is not an 'heir' to anything (-2); he is not the son of God but the son of Man (-4); there is no narrative corresponding to points 5-7; we are told things of his childhood in Lk. 2.41-52 (-8); he does not have a kingdom, is not hailed as a king and does not reign (-9, -10 and -11); he has no subjects (-13); crucifixion is not mysterious (-15); he has no battle with a great adversary (-20); his parents are never said to be related (-21); he never marries (-22). Lastly, the Gospel of John provides no better information either, giving Jesus points 3, 4, 8, 12, 16, 17, 18 and 19 for a total of eight, largely for the same reasons outlined above. However, these are not even our earliest sources. If one looked toward the authentic Pauline Epistles, one would find that Jesus does not satisfy even close to the needed amount for Carrier's position. The Pauline Epistles would grant Jesus points 4, 8, 12, 17 and 18, or five in total, as Paul does not leave us with much to work with.

Thus, from my calculations, Jesus should not score remotely as high as he does with various mythicists and those who wish to push him further into the category of a mythical hero. Carrier's arguments work only if we apply very loose definitions to each point, contorting everything to make Jesus fit better, such as Carrier's allegorical interpretation of 22 as Jesus' marriage to the church.<sup>43</sup> As such, we can see that the entirety of this pattern relies on extremely subjective and, for the most part, prejudiced interpretations in order to actually be applied to Jesus. This results in almost every author having a different perception on what Jesus actually satisfies and does not satisfy. Thus, one must ask whether or not the Raglan archetype is even useful because one could argue that Carrier's alterations and contortion of the points, as well as the numerous inconsistencies among various academics who have written on this topic, demonstrate that the entire pattern and its application is more arbitrary than anything.

This also can be seen in the fact that Carrier and others debate regarding its application to other figures. Carrier would certainly oppose Utley's

42. Luke 4.16-30 is the only place where Jesus is actively thrown out of a town under threat.

43. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, p. 233.

arguments that Lincoln fits all twenty-two points. However, the only way for him to do so would be to argue for a more strenuous archetype than what he implements, which would ultimately mean that he must concede a lower score for Jesus. Otherwise, he would be methodologically inconsistent. As a case in point, if Carrier were to argue that Lincoln was not a king, nor was he hailed as a king by his followers, the same could be said of Jesus, and the remaining points would follow. If Carrier's methodology was in any way consistent, then Jesus would not be among the Lord Raglan heroes and, as a result, Carrier's prior probability would be proven fallacious. If Carrier would not concede this, then he proves that his own methodology is inconsistent. His prior probability is thus still fallacious because it is proven to be an arbitrary application without any consistent rigor, and ultimately self-contradictory depending on who gets assessed for its application.

This is further exemplified when one realizes that the Raglan archetype ultimately fails to have much application outside of hero traditions inspired by Greco-Roman literature.<sup>44</sup> It does tend to apply closely to heroes of Greco-Roman literature, as has been rather consistently validated, such as Oedipus and Romulus.<sup>45</sup> For instance, a statistical analysis of the Raglan archetype shows that it has virtually no validity outside of the confines of the Greco-Roman areas, with a 79 per cent correspondence in Mediterranean heroes, but only a 28 per cent correspondence in five other cultural regions, and a total of 45 per cent cross culturally.<sup>46</sup> As such, it is inherently a very ethnocentric model and is, in effect, inconsistent itself. What this arguably means is that attempts to apply it to Jesus, who is presented as Jewish along with his biographies, will produce the varying results we have seen, since they require a projection of Greco-Roman narrative patterning onto Jesus, where they may not apply on a logical basis (for instance, considering Jesus being called a 'king' by the magi and the literal kingship of Romulus

44. M. David Litwa, *How the Gospels Became History: Jesus and Mediterranean Myths* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), pp. 35-37.

45. Lord Raglan, 'The Hero of Tradition' and more recently Kenneth Glazer, *Searching for Oedipus: How I Found Meaning in an Ancient Masterpiece* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, 2018), pp. 72-73.

46. Victor Cook, 'Lord Raglan's Hero—A Cross Cultural Critique', *The Florida Anthropologist* 18 (1965), pp. 147-54. Other scholars have indicated similar results; see Erhan Aktaş, 'Lord Raglan'ın Kahraman Kalıbı ve Alp Han Orba', *Siberian Studies (SAD)* 2.4 (2014), pp. 13-30.

to be comparable on the archetype). It creates a cultural universalism, in effect, which seems methodologically dubious at best.

### *Generic Realities*

The last point I wish to highlight is the fact that patterns of this type can work naturally for historical figures, whom I have listed, precisely because of how generic they are, even without Carrier's added generalizations. In the following list, I provide the points which I think are so generic that they could probably apply to an average ruler with a problematic birth: (2) father is king or heir of king; (3) unusual circumstances for his conception can occur due to a rare sex disorder, since that is definitionally unusual by its rarity; (4) he is reputed a son of a god (e.g. the Pharaohs, Caesars, Zhou Dynasty, Jewish rulers [Ps. 2] and more); (5) an attempt is made to kill this son of the king as a babe, which is a commonality in politics; (9) he returns to his future kingdom; (10) he is crowned as king; (11) he reigns uneventfully; (12) he prescribes laws; (13) he loses favor with subjects (e.g. French and October revolutions); (14) he is driven from his throne or city (e.g. Tzar Nicholas II); (15) he meets a mysterious death (e.g. Nicholas II, Richard II, Robert I, Donald III, etc.; strange deaths were a commonality); (16) dying on a hill or high place could be said of anyone who died in their bed in a castle tower; (17) it is common in times of conflict for a king's children to not succeed him; (20) defeating a great adversary before taking a wife or throne was not uncommon; (21) it was exceptionally common for rulers to be related to their spouse (the Habsburgs, for instance); (22) it was not uncommon to marry the queen or princess of a predecessor.

This, however, leaves a problem for Carrier and others who use the Raglan archetype. Carrier specifically claims that a reference class should be chosen based on the fact that it is 'specific enough to be certain of a connection other than coincidence', and 'it has a lot of members'.<sup>47</sup> But as I have demonstrated in this article, numerous historical figures can satisfy more than half of the points on the Raglan hero archetype by sheer coincidence of being kings and considered divine with an abnormal birth story

47. Richard Carrier, 'For the Existence of Jesus, is the Principle of Contamination Invalid? Cavin & Colombetti vs. Law', *Richard Carrier Blogs*, <https://www.richardcarrier.info/archives/13461>.

(both of which are extremely common in legendarized accounts of rulers, e.g. Pharaohs or Caesars). The fact that there are ‘a lot of members’ in this pattern means that it cannot be demonstrated to be for any reason other than they happened to exist and be royalty. Carrier’s own more generalized pattern, in fact, exacerbates this even further, as he states it increases the ability for historical persons to fit it.<sup>48</sup> As such, there is an inherent contradiction between the reason why a pattern should be chosen, and what Carrier did to it, as well as an even greater problem that more than half of the points are exceptionally generic and thus not specific enough to rule out coincidence.

As one can see, the majority of the points on this list could be obtained by a single ruler who had the life of a generic king in a time of political upheaval. This is all that would be required for a figure to acquire an immensely high score. This is because these points are so simplistic and relatable to virtually any narrative that they ultimately become useless and apply just as much to historical as to mythical personages. In application, the Raglan archetype could not tell whether a single event is mythical or historical. Because the elements of the archetype are so generic, historical events could easily be counted as mythical just by coincidence, which Carrier and company have not noticed due to their selection biases.

### *Conclusions*

Given the above information, it seems prudent to abandon the application of the Raglan hero pattern to Jesus. Carrier’s usage of it as a reference class (along with Price and Lataster who use it similarly) should be seen as a warning to other academics. Carrier clearly did not account for various other figures who have been analyzed since Raglan published his work on the hero pattern. Instead, he relied almost exclusively on Raglan’s list of a few mythic figures and then did his own separate account of Jesus, without consulting any previous literature that has been written on these matters.

The present study presented seventeen historical figures who were all Raglan heroes if one uses either Carrier’s or Raglan’s versions of the

48. Richard Carrier, ‘On the Historicity of Jesus: The Daniel Gullotta Review’, *Richard Carrier Blogs*, <https://www.richardcarrier.info/archives/13573>. That Carrier misses these historical persons who fit the pattern quite nicely indicates nothing but his own selection bias and inconsistent application of the criteria.

pattern. This demonstrated that if Carrier wanted to argue against any of the particular figures fitting the pattern, such as Abraham Lincoln, this would necessarily have to reflect on his application of the pattern to Jesus by making it more stringent. If Carrier would not do so, then his methods are proven inconsistent and fallacious. If he would, then he would show that Jesus must score lower on the pattern than what he originally granted. Either way, it ultimately defeats Carrier's goals. In addition, the ethnocentrism and generic nature of the archetype meant that any attempts to apply it to Jesus were necessarily a projection of a specific cultural phenomenon upon that of Jesus' biographies (which are clearly still connected to a Jewish background, even if styled as Greco-Roman biographies).<sup>49</sup> Since the points are exceptionally generic, it is also the case that a historical figure could fit more than half of them just by sheer coincidence of being a king (case in point, Tsar Nicholas II scores fourteen points in total). As such, there appears to be no methodologically viable way for the Raglan archetype to produce a meaningful outcome in the Christ Myth debate without dubious methods being employed, from genericizing to twisting the portraits of Jesus into the archetype. It ultimately shows more about the motivations of the scholars who use it, than it says anything about the historicity of Jesus.

49. For discussion on this, see Litwa, *How the Gospels Became History*.