

What did Jesus Christ look like?

Several lines of possible inquiry present themselves, as further developed below:

1. [Stereotyping Jewish physical features](#) (racial or genetic considerations)
2. [Holy Scripture](#)
3. [Other Writings](#)
4. [Holy Icons](#) (paintings)
 - A. [Christ Pantocrator](#)
 - B. The [Holy Mandylion](#) (hand towel or cloth) of Christ (including a brief mention of the *Holy Keramion*)

Stereotyping Jewish physical features

From wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotypes_of_Jews) we read “it is often assumed that Jews have curly black hair, large hook-noses, thick lips, dark-colored beady eyes ... swarthy and hirsute. ... In European culture, prior to the 20th century, red hair was commonly identified as the distinguishing negative Jewish trait and identified with Judas Iscariot: during the Spanish Inquisition, all those with red hair were identified as Jewish. In Italy, red hair was associated with Italian Jews, and Judas was traditionally depicted as red-haired in Italian and Spanish art. Writers from Shakespeare to Dickens would identify Jewish characters by giving them red hair. The stereotype remains in parts of Eastern Europe and Russia, but not in the US or Western Europe.”

To understand the prevalent Western stereotype of Jesus, you have to find a source that has somehow given the topic an air of scientific credibility, subtly blended with a mix of Protestant skepticism and theological predispositions, and, preferably, presented using the latest computer generated imagery within the framework of a big-budget movie or television production. Nicely filling this bill we have a three-episode, 2001 British production *Son of God* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Son_of_God_\(TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Son_of_God_(TV_series))). For the final episode, a retired British medical artist, Richard Neave, selected a “representative”, “Semetic”, “first-century” skull and, using the most advanced, computer-based, forensic facial reconstruction techniques, constructed a scientific view of what Jesus may have looked like: a broad face with a large nose (negroid looking rather than aquiline). (But note! The most recognizable features of the face—the folds of the eyes, structure of the nose and shape of the mouth—are left to the individual preferences of the forensic artist, and have nothing to do with any evidence available from the skull!) For the final touches, a New Testament Protestant “scholar”, Dr. Mark Goodacre of the University of Birmingham (now Duke University), served as a consultant, and the reconstruction was given a “swarthy”, “olive-coloured” skin complexion with dark eyes and dark “short, curly hair and a short cropped beard”. So the biases of these two men (Neave and Goodacre), along with a single skull, have now, through the medium of television—and many follow-on magazine and online articles—presented a picture of “Jesus” to millions of viewers and readers, that is accepted as “scientific” (and so somehow better than previous stereotypes).

Another scientific-based approach would be to consider what might be gleaned from the modern field of genetics. Extensive studies have been conducted on the genetic heritage of the various Jewish populations found today (cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetic_studies_of_Jewish_origins). From a population (not individual) perspective, the evidence from genetics indicates “that modern Levant populations descend from two major apparent ancestral populations. One set of genetic characteristics which is shared with modern-day Europeans and Central Asians is most prominent in the Levant amongst ‘Lebanese, Armenians, Cypriots, Druze and Jews, as well as Turks, Iranians and Caucasian populations’. The second set of inherited genetic characteristics is shared with populations in other parts of the Middle East as well as some African populations. Levant populations in this category today include ‘Palestinians, Jordanians, Syrians, as well as North Africans, Ethiopians, Saudis, and Bedouins’. ... this second component of ancestry... correlates with ‘the pattern of the Islamic expansion’, and that ‘a pre-Islamic expansion Levant was more genetically similar to Europeans than to Middle Easterners ...’”. [Read this sentence again and note, based on genetics, Jesus would have looked more like a European and not someone from the Middle East of today!] While such a conclusion flies in the face of the predispositions or unspoken stereotypes behind the Neave and Goodacre “Jesus”, it leaves the field of possibilities open, if not all the way, quite wide (i.e., a typical Jew of Jesus’ day would have had features somewhere within the realm of what a Lebanese-Armenian-Cypriot-Druze-Turk-Iranian-Caucasian looks like—think of people from the Tigris and Euphrates river basins or of the northern and eastern reaches of the Fertile Crescent).

Holy Scripture

The Jews of Jesus’ day asserted that “Abraham is our father” (John 8.39a ONT). However, this could not be a claim to some kind of racial purity. Even beginning with the offspring of Israel (Jacob, Abraham’s grandson) marriages outside of his line began. [Recall that Abraham sent his servant to “my country, where I was born, and to my tribe” to get a wife for his son Isaac (Rebecca; Gen. 24.2 ff.), rather than allow him to marry a Canaanite. His country was the land of the Sumerians, Akkadians, Assyrians, and Babylonians lying along the present Turkish-Syrian and Iran-Iraq borders; and, perhaps not surprising, it corresponds strongly to the lands of the Lebanese-Armenian-Cypriot-Druze-Turk-Iranian-Caucasian “genetic” Jew introduced in the first part of this paper! Likewise Isaac sent his son, Jacob, to find a cousin to wed (he actually married two: Lea and Rachel), rather than marry a Canaanite (Gen. 28.6 ff.).] However, Jacob’s son Joseph married an Egyptian, and Jacob, furthermore, adopted Joseph’s “half-bloods” as his own!

Genesis (Brenton’s LXX)—41:45 And Pharaoh called the name of Joseph, Psonthomphanech; and he gave him Aseneth, the daughter of Petephres, priest of Heliopolis, to wife. ... 48:1 And it came to pass after these things, that it was reported to Joseph, Behold, thy father is ill; and, having taken his two sons, Manasse and Ephraim, he came to Jacob. 2 And it was reported to Jacob, saying, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh to thee; and Israel having strengthened himself, sat upon the bed. 3 And Jacob said to

Joseph, My God appeared to me in Luza, in the land of Chanaan, and blessed me, 4 and said to me, Behold, I will increase thee, and multiply thee, and will make of thee multitudes of nations; and I will give this land to thee, and to thy seed after thee, for an everlasting possession. 5 Now then thy two sons, who were born to thee in the land of Egypt, before I came to thee into Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasse, as Ruben and Symeon they shall be mine. 6 And the children which thou shalt beget hereafter, shall be in the name of their brethren; they shall be named after their inheritances.

By the time the Israelites left Egypt several hundred years after Joseph first arrived, significant inter-marriages with the Egyptians (or other people living there; e.g., slaves or mercenaries) had taken place such that Holy Scripture relates:

Exodus 12 (LXX)—36 And the Lord gave his people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, and they lent to them; and they spoiled the Egyptians. 37 And the children Israel departed from Ramesses to Socchoth, to the full number of six hundred thousand footmen, even men, besides the baggage. 38 **And a great mixed company went up with them**, and sheep and oxen and very much cattle.

Yet, in spite of this mixing of blood lines, it would appear, genetically, that the race of Jews is still predominately of Abraham's physical seed. (Being a True child of Abraham is another thing entirely!)

Holy Scripture also explicitly tells us of non-Jews in Jesus' family tree:

Matthew 1.1-16 (ONT)—The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. ... and Salmon begat Booz of Rachab [a **Canaanite**; cf. Joshua 2.1 ff] and Booz begat Obed of Ruth [a **Moabite**; cf. Ruth 1, 4.13 ff], and ... Mary, of whom was born Jesus Who is called Christ.

Be that as it may, this all adds little to our understanding. Even an expanded reading of the Scriptures might tell us, e.g., of how Esau, Jacob's brother was red and hairy (Gen. 25.24), although Jacob was fair—and so perhaps help explain the red hair and hirsute stereotypes of Jews held by some, but it does little to answer the question of what did Jesus look like? In fact, the only thing we have from Scriptures in this regard are several prophecies: two of Jesus before His arrest, and one after His Passion and Crucifixion:

Psalms 44 (OP)—2 **Comely art Thou in beauty beyond the sons of men**; grace was poured forth on Thy lips; therefore God blessed Thee to the age. 3 Gird for Thyself Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Mighty One, **in Thy comeliness and Thy beauty**. 4 And bend Thy bow, and be Thou prosperous on Thy journey, and do Thou reign, on account of truth and meekness and righteousness; and Thy right hand shall guide Thee wondrously. 5 Thine arrows, having been sharpened, O mighty One—under Thee shall peoples fall—are in the heart of the enemies of the King. 6 Thy throne, O God, is unto the age of the age; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. 7 Thou didst love righteousness and hate iniquity. Therefore God, Thy God, anointed Thee with the

oil of gladness beyond Thy companions. 8 Myrrh and stacte and cassia waft from Thy garments, from the palaces of ivory; out of which they gladdened Thee—daughters of kings in Thine honor.

Song of Solomon 5 (Brenton's LXX)—10 My kinsman is white and ruddy, **chosen out from myriads**. 11 His head is as very fine gold, his locks are flowing, black as a raven. 12 His eyes are as doves, by the pools of waters, washed with milk, sitting by the pools. 13 His cheeks are as bowls of spices pouring forth perfumes: his lips are lilies, dropping choice myrrh. 14 His hands are as turned gold set with beryl: his belly is an ivory tablet on a sapphire stone. 15 His legs are marble pillars set on golden sockets: his form is as Libanus, choice as the cedars. 16 His throat is most sweet, and altogether desirable. This is my kinsman, and this is my companion, O daughters of Jerusalem.

and

Esaias 53 (Brenton's LXX)—1 O Lord, who has believed our report? and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 We brought a report as of a child before him; **he is as a root in a thirsty land: he has no form nor comeliness**; and we saw him, but **he had no form nor beauty**. 3 But **his form was ignoble, and inferior to that of the children of men; he was a man in suffering, and acquainted with the bearing of sickness**, for his face is turned from us: he was dishonoured, and not esteemed. 4 He bears our sins, and **is pained** for us: yet we accounted him to be in trouble, and **in suffering, and in affliction**. 5 But **he was wounded** on account of our sins, and **was bruised** because of our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his bruises we were healed. 6 All we as sheep have gone astray; every one has gone astray in his way; and the Lord gave him up for our sins. 7 And he, because of his affliction, opens not his mouth: he was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. 8 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken away from the earth: because of the iniquities of my people he was led to death. 9 And I will give the wicked for his burial, and the rich for his death; for he practised no iniquity, nor craft with his mouth. 10 The Lord also is pleased to purge him from his stroke. If ye can give an offering for sin, your soul shall see a long-lived seed: 11 the Lord also is pleased to take away from the travail of his soul, to shew him light, and to form him with understanding; to justify the just one who serves many well; and he shall bear their sins. 12 Therefore he shall inherit many, and he shall divide the spoils of the mighty; because his soul was delivered to death: and he was numbered among the transgressors; and he bore the sins of many, and was delivered because of their iniquities.

Other Writings

Saint Justin Martyr (+165), in his First Apology (addressed to the Emperor Titus Ælius Adrianus Antoninus Pius Augustus Cæsar, et al.), makes reference to the *Acts of Pontius Pilate* that documented events concerning Christ (§35 and 48):

“And how Christ ... And that these things did happen, you can ascertain from the Acts of Pontius Pilate.” [1] ... “And that it was predicted that our Christ should ... And that He did those things, you can learn from the Acts of Pontius Pilate.” [2]

Certainly one would think that St. Justin would have been called to account by Cæsar—or his other readers—if such “acts” did not exist! Other early Church fathers made reference to these acts as well, in positive and negative terms, including Eusebius of Caesarea, St. Epiphanius of Salamis, Paulus Orosius, and St. Gregory of Tours. [3] A brief search on the Internet will quickly yield a handful of texts—mostly published in the 19th century—that assert that they contain “acts” of Pilate. What the authentic, complete corpus of Pilate’s works might include is unclear and likely never to be known. In spite of this uncertainty, however, we might presuppose that they could contain writings of various genres, depending upon the topic and audience, including narratives—an extract of one of which follows below that records Pilate in a dialogue, here providing a description of Jesus: [4]

“... Among the various rumors that came to my ears, there was one that attracted my attention. A young man, it was said, had appeared in Galilee, preaching with a noble unction, a new law, in the name of God who sent Him. At first, I was apprehensive that his design was to stir up the people against the Romans, but soon were my fears dispelled. Jesus of Nazareth spoke rather as a friend of the Romans than of the Jews. One day, in passing by the place of Siloe, where there was a great concourse of people, I observed in the midst of the group, a young man leaning against a tree, who was calmly addressing the multitude. I was told that it was Jesus. This I could have easily suspected, so great was the difference between him and those who were listening to Him. He appeared to be about thirty years of age. His golden [5] colored hair and beard, gave his appearance a celestial aspect. Never had I seen a sweeter or more serene countenance. What a contrast between him and his hearers, with their black beards and tawny complexions! Unwilling to interrupt him by my presence, I continued my walk, but signified to my secretary to join the group and listen. ...”

Material that includes very similar content can be found in the form of a long letter from Pontius Pilate to Tiberius Cæsar, Emperor of Rome; the physical description of Jesus is almost identical: [6]

“... Among the various rumors that came to my ears, there was one that attracted my attention in particular. A young man, it was said, had appeared in Galilee, preaching with a noble unction, a new law in the name of the God that had sent Him. At first I was apprehensive that his design was to stir up the people against the Romans; but my fears were soon dispelled. Jesus of Nazareth spoke rather as a friend of the Romans than of the Jews. One day in passing by the place of Siloe, where there was a great concourse of people, I observed in the midst of the group a young man who was leaning against a tree, calmly addressing the multitude. I was told it was Jesus. This I could easily have suspected, so great was the difference between him and those who were listening to Him. His golden colored hair and beard gave to his appearance a celestial aspect. He appeared to be about thirty years of age. Never have I seen a sweeter or more serene

countenance. What a contrast between him and his hearers, with their black beards and tawny complexions! Unwilling to interrupt him by my presence, I continued my walk, but signified to my secretary to join the group and listen. ...”

The similarity between these two extracts from different sources is almost uncanny; placed side-by-side the two complete documents contain many differences, but often, as here, near duplications. But from whence did they come? What manuscript from what monastery? Or, in the case of Mahan’s work, what actual document from the library in the “Vatican at Rome” contained Pilate’s letter as quoted in translation here? And what is the relationship of this material to the Acts of Pontius Pilate referred to by St. Justin?

A second description of Jesus is found in the *Letter of Lentulus*, an epistle addressed from the Roman Consul Publius Lentulus to the Roman Senate (cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letter_of_Lentulus). The oldest English translation I have found reference to was published by Francis Smith in London in 1680, which reads as follows:

“There has appeared in these our days a Man of great virtue, called Jesus Christ, who is yet living amongst us, and of the People is accepted for a Prophet, but his own Disciples, Son of God. He raised the Dead and cureth all manner of Diseases, a Man of stature somewhat Tall and Comely, with a very reverend Countenance, such as the beholders may both Love and Fear, his Hair of the colour of a Chestnut full ripe, and plain almost down to his ears, but from the ears downward somewhat curled, and more orient of colour waving about his Shoulders. In the midst [sic] of his Head goeth a seam or partition of his Hair, after the manner of the Nazarites; his Forehead very plain and smooth; his Face without spot or wrinkle [sic], beautified with a comely red; his Nose and Mouth so formed as nothing can be reprehended; his Beard somewhat thick, agreeable in colour to the Hair of his Head not of any great length, but forked in the midst; of innocent look; his Eys [sic] gray, clear, and quick. In reproving he is severe, in admonishing courteous, and fair-spoken, pleasant in speech mixed with gravity. It cannot be remembered that any have seen him laugh, but many have seen him weep: in proportion of Body well shaped and straight, his Hands and Armes very delectable to behold; in speaking, very temperate, modest, and wise. A Man for his singular beauty surpassing the Children of Men.”

There is an intriguingly similar description of Jesus addressed to Tiberius Caesar by a Praetorium Prefect, Puplius Lentoulos, a former governor at Judaea [pre-Pontius Pilate], that is recorded in the *Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church* [7] under the entry for the holy Myrrh-bearer and Equal-to-the-apostles Mary Magdalene (22 July):

“I have been informed, O Caesar, that thou desire to learn in writing the matter concerning a certain virtuous man named Jesus the Christ. He is deemed by many of the people to be a prophet. His disciples believe that he is a god or a son of the one God. They state that this Jesus fashioned the heaven and earth and all that is within. The truth be told, there are some astonishing things concerning this Christ. Miracles

abound: He raises the dead and heals the sick with but a word. He is a man of average height, handsome of countenance with an air of majesty. Those that encounter him are enjoined either to love him or fear him. His hair is the color of walnut, which extends to his shoulders and glistens. He belongs to the group known as Nazarenes. His forehead is smooth and calm. His face is without wrinkles or blemishes. His nose and lips are regular. His beard is dense and the same color as his hair. It is not long, but it separates in two at the middle. He has a serious look that can excite fear. He possesses power like a ray of the sun. On the one hand when he rebukes, one is moved to fear and weep. On the other hand, there is also a grace and loveliness about his gravity. It is said that no one has ever seen him laugh. But he has been seen to weep on a number of occasions. He has well fashioned hands and arms. His manner of address is pleasing. His mother is also a beautiful woman, the most beautiful I might add, so that some say she looks like a goddess. If thou dost wish to question the man for thyself, inform me and I shall forthwith dispatch him to thee. All of those in Jerusalem marvel at him, especially his wisdom, though he has never studied in the customary schools. He often walks barefooted and without a head covering. Some laugh at him, while others tremble in his presence from their astonishment. He never preaches anything to promote himself in this world. But again some of the Jews here believed that he is the one God come in the flesh. Others, O Caesar, allege that he is an enemy of Your Majesty. Ofttimes, these tiresome Jews trouble me. But this Christ has never urged anyone to do anything displeasing, but rather he exhorts the people to perform good deeds. All those who have come into contact with him claim that they have received nothing but benefit from him. However, Your Majesty, I am ready to obey the imperial command. Whatsoever, Caesar, thou wilt order, I will carry out.”

The last description of Jesus comes from a purported interview between Gamaliel and Joseph and Mary: [\[8\]](#)

“I asked him to describe [t]his person to me, so that I might know him if I should meet him. He said: ‘If you ever meet him you will know him. While he is nothing but a man, there is something about him that distinguishes him from every other man. He is the picture of his mother, only he has not her smooth, round face. His hair is a little more golden than hers, though it is as much from sunburn as anything else. He is tall, and his shoulders are a little drooped; his visage is thin and of a swarthy complexion, though this is from exposure. His eyes are large and a soft blue, and rather dull and heavy. The lashes are long, and his eyebrows very large. His nose is that of a Jew.’”

The provenance and veracity of any of this material is unknown—although I have no reason to doubt the account found in the *Synaxaristes*, and certainly consider the full account by Gamaliel to be representative of the slander the Jews published against the Christians—and likely untraceable to an original autograph and so unverifiable at this point in time. Skeptics discount them as forgeries. However, all of these accounts are provided here for completeness sake at face value. And if these sources can’t be fully trusted (I am not saying they are all wrong) at least they might inspire inquiring minds to continue the quest toward finding an answer to the question of “What did Jesus look like?”

Holy Icons

Without launching into a theological dissertation on the correct understanding and use of images, it should be understood that, while original icons (image, portrait) used for prayer that date from the first centuries of Christianity have not reached us—due to the ravages of time, pagans, and heretics—the Church maintains that authentic images of Christ have existed from the very beginning.” [9] Historical [10] and archaeological [11] evidence supports this as well. It should also be understood that the Church “stipulates that artists paint icons as they were painted by the ancient and holy iconographers.” [12] The reason? “The icon is one of the manifestations of the holy Tradition of the Church, similar to the written and oral traditions. ... The ‘icon,’ ... corresponds entirely to the ‘word’ of Scripture. ‘That which the word communicates by sound, the painting shows silently by representation,’ says St Basil the Great. And the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council repeat these words and specify that ‘through these two mediums which accompany each other... we acquire the knowledge of the same realities.’ ... Often, and with good reason, the icon is called ‘theology in images.’” [13] “For a sacred image, just as for the sacred writings, a relative and variable criterion cannot be valid.” [14] “In other words, the teaching of the Church can be falsified by the image as much as by word.” [15] “The Orthodox Church has always fought to defend its sacred art against secularization. Through the voice of its councils, its hierarchy and its faithful, it fought to retain the purity of the sacred image against the penetration of foreign elements characteristic of secular art. The Church did not fight for the artistic quality of its art, but for its authenticity, not for its beauty, but for its truth.” [16] “Even if we do not recognize that the icon represents an image identical with its prototype owing to lack of skill [and, unfortunately, unskilled productions abound], yet our words will not be inept. For veneration is not shown to an icon inasmuch as it falls short of resembling the prototype, but inasmuch it represents a likeness to it.” [17] So, while it may not be possible to sort out the veracity of the writings appearing under the name of Pilate, et al., it is possible to place reliance in the witness of the Church, through her Holy Icons, when answering the question of “What did Jesus look like?”

What follows below are examples of three famous Icons that represent Jesus Christ as an adult—that is, during the time of His ministry here on Earth: *Christ Pantocrator*, the *Mandylion*, and the related *Keramion* (or *Keramidion*). While it would certainly be an interesting study to collect and present a broader selection of these Icons from across time and space, if you learn the features of the examples presented here, you would have no trouble identifying them in any Orthodox Church of any milieu.

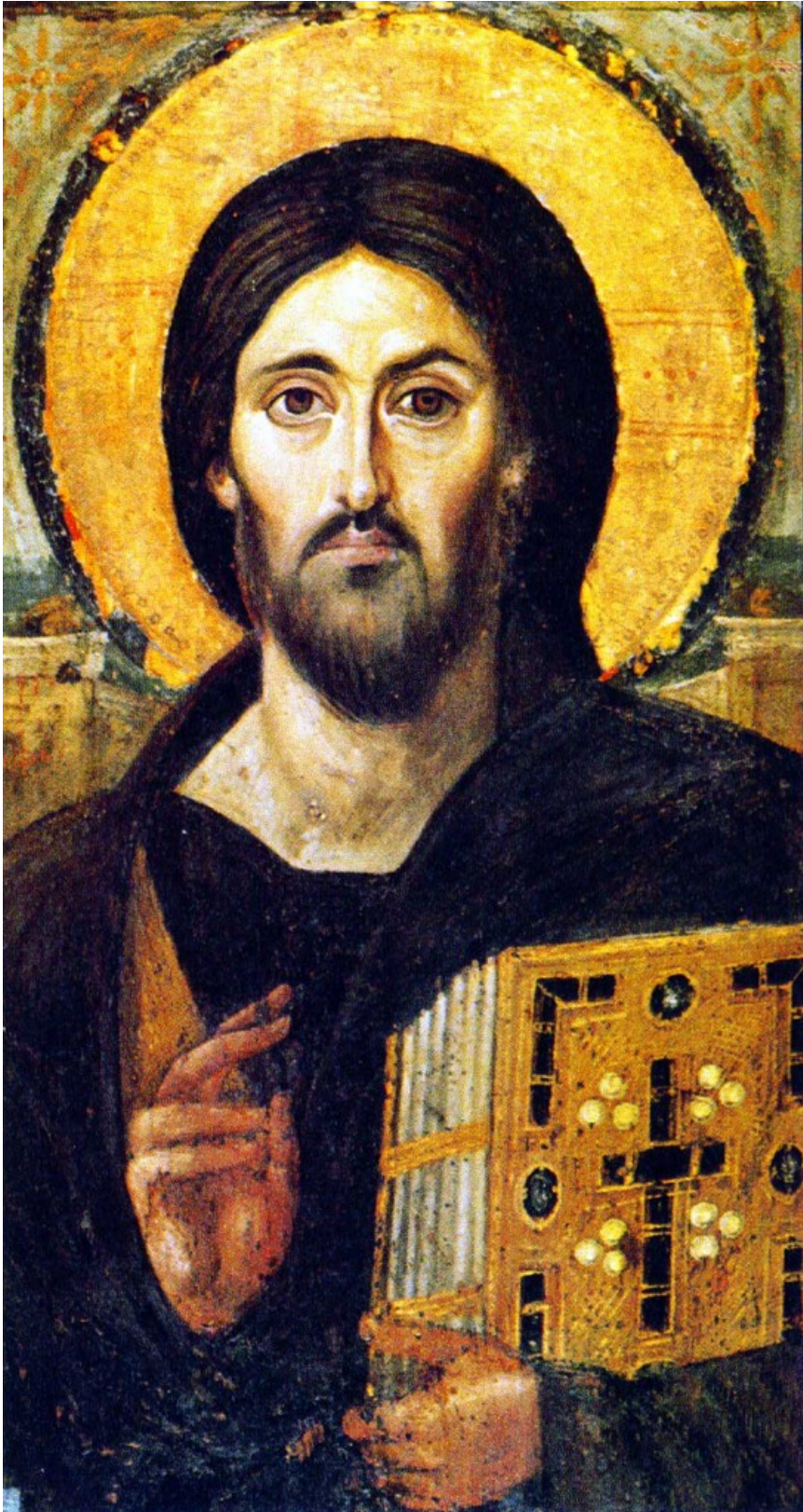
Not reviewed here are examples of Jesus as an adolescent (beardless youth; think of the time of His visit to the Temple at twelve years of age where all the teachers of Israel were “beside themselves at His comprehension and answers”—as He put it, doing “the things of My Father” as found in Luke 2:46-49). Another possible study area would be the Icons of Mariam (Mary) the mother of Jesus Christ, the Theotokos, especially those painted by the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke while she was still alive; certainly some physical traits of the mother would have passed to the son, and Luke’s portrayal of Jesus as a child would

have, necessarily, met with her approval.

Christ Pantocrator (“Ruler of all”)

St. Justinian the Great was Roman emperor from 527 to 565. Among his many works was the construction of St. Catherine’s Monastery at Mount Sinai. [18] At its founding, among the many rich endowments St. Justinian apparently sent to the monastery was a Christ Pantocrator icon of exceptionally high quality, in which the artist has been able to convey pictorially the dogma of the two natures of Christ—the divine and the human. [19] While links to an autograph are no longer known, there is no reason to doubt that they would trace to original works, such as Eusebius references (the emperor certainly would not countenance a work that would engender a cry of “fake”). Christ Pantocrator icons, frescoes, and mosaics that thematically parallel this work can likely be found in most (if not all) Orthodox Churches built down to the present day.

What did Jesus Christ look like?



Christ Pantocrator—Sinai (early 6th century).

The *Holy Mandylion* (hand towel or cloth) of Christ

Many—or most—people have heard of Constantine the Great, and might be able to relate that he was an important Roman emperor. Many Christians are likewise aware that he played a significant role in the history of the early Church. Orthodox Christians will recognize that he is venerated as a Saint, and some will even know him by the title Equal-to-the-apostles for his outstanding service in spreading and establishing Christianity; further, they may be aware of his role in the “Edict of Toleration” that officially ended the Diocletian persecution of Christianity, and in the “Edict of Milan” which restored confiscated properties to Christians.

But how many have heard of the Kingdom of Osroene and its capital city of Edessa? Or recognize it as what many believe to be the birthplace of the Righteous Patriarch Abraham? Or, even more to the point, know that it was apparently the first country with a Christian king and where Christianity became the official religion—long before Constantine! By what means could this have taken place? I believe that the initial movement behind this was the witness of a king who exchanged letters with Jesus Christ, was healed of leprosy, received an Apostle of the Seventy, and was given a miraculous icon (acheiropoieta, “made without hand”)—one where Jesus Himself imprinted His likeness on a towel—the Holy Mandylion! A “reader’s digest” version of this account can be found in the history [20] written by Bishop Eusebius of [Caesarea Maritima](#) (+340). For a more complete story of the Holy Mandylion—including a discussion its miraculous impress (a mirror image made by direct contact), the Holy Keramion (Tile)—to the time of its translation from Edessa to Constantinople in the year 944, and up until its loss during the sack of Constantinople by the Latin Crusaders in 1204, see, for example, the entry in the Great Synaxaristes. [21] It might be noted that until its translation, the visual composition of the Holy Mandylion was little known (and so no known copies were made) in the West, mostly because Edessa was often outside of the control or borders of the Roman Empire. However, once the Holy Mandylion was brought to Constantinople, copies quickly spread, and a number of examples can be found dating from the 10th century down to the present. Most Orthodox Churches have a copy of the Holy Mandylion, and many have the Holy Keramion as well.

What did Jesus Christ look like?



Holy Mandylion—Boyana Church, Sofia, Bulgaria (1259).



Holy Keramion—Visoki Dečani monastery, Kosovo, Serbia (ca. 1335).

Often, as mentioned above, both the *Holy Mandylion* and *Holy Keramion* appear together in the same church. As an illustration of this, following below find an example of the pair from the Transfiguration Cathedral of the Mirozh Monastery in Pskov, Russia. (Forgive the distortion—I was not quite able to “flatten” these images (remove the perspective) from the original photographs.) It might be noted that these two Icons face each other across the nave as a reminder that the image on the tile is an impress of the original on the napkin (typical practice when both Icons appear together).

What did Jesus Christ look like?



Holy Mandylion—Transfiguration Cathedral, Mirozh Monastery, Pskov, Russia (ca. 1140).

What did Jesus Christ look like?



Holy Keramion—Transfiguration Cathedral, Mirozh Monastery, Pskov, Russia (ca. 1140).

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The Orthodox Psalter [OP], Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, 2010.

Footnotes

[1] Justin Martyr. (1885). "The First Apology of Justin". In A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe (Eds.), *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Vol. 1, p. 175). Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company.

[2] Ibid, p. 179.

[3] See, for example, J.E. Cross, et al., *Two Old English Apocrypha and Their Manuscript Source: The Gospel of Nichodemus and The Avenging of the Saviour, Volume 19 of Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 39.

[4] "Pontius Pilate.—An Extraordinary Narrative. Translated from the French". In *The Ladies' Garland and Family Magazine, Vol. 7*, J. Van Court, 1844, pp. 261-265. The preface to the text reads: "The following singular article ... purports to be extracted from a manuscript found in a monastery. ..." Unreferenced but clear paraphrases and quotes of this material also appear in L. McWherter, *The King of Glory: the Most Important Events. The Life of Jesus Christ, Their Precious and Practical Lessons to Humanity*, Southwestern Publishing House, Nashville, 1884.

[5] It might be noted that red hair, when exposed to the sun for long periods, can turn various shades of brown or yellow bronze (not unlike a shade of blond). The Church canon (rule) for Icons is to paint Christ's hair using a brown base, highlighted with yellow ochre (Rt. Rev. Bishop John of Colorado Spring and Southern America, Dormition Skete, personal comm., 22JAN16 (NS)).

[6] W.D. Mahan, *Archæological Writings of the Sanhedrin and Talmuds of the Jews, Taken from the Ancient Parchments and Scrolls at Constantinople and the Vatican at Rome, Being the Record made by the Enemies of Jesus of Nazareth in His Day. The Most Interesting History Ever Read by Man*. Perrin & Smith, St. Louis, 1884, pp. 208-230. [Extracts of this source are distributed widely over the Internet as "The letter from Pontius Pilate to Tiberius Caesar" with an assertion that it is a reprinting of a letter held in the Congressional Library in Washington, D.C.]

[7] *The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, July*, trans. from the Greek, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, 2008, Vol. 7 (July), pp. 950-951.

[8] "Gamaliel's interview with Joseph and Mary and others concerning Jesus", in *The Archko Volume; or the Archeological Writings of the Sanhedrim and Talmuds of the Jews*. McIntosh

and Twyman, trans., Antiquarian Book Co., Philadelphia, 1913, p. 92.

[9] Ouspensky, Leonid, *Theology of the Icon, Vol. 1*, Gythiel and Meyendorff, trans., St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1992, p. 58.

[10] Eusebius. *The Ecclesiastical History*, Page, et al., eds., Lake & Oulton, trans., London; New York; Cambridge, MA: William Heinemann; G. P. Putnam's Sons; Harvard University Press, 1926-1932 (Vol. 2, pp. 175-177). London; New York; Cambridge, MA: William Heinemann; G. P. Putnam's Sons; Harvard University Press.

[11] Cf. "The Church of the House of St. Peter at Capernaum," in *Ancient Churches Revealed*, Tsafir, ed., Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem, 1993, p. 71 ff.

[12] Ouspensky, p. 11.

[13] Ibid, p. 8.

[14] Ibid, p. 14.

[15] Ibid, p. 16.

[16] Ibid, pp. 14-15.

[17] St. Theodore the Studite, *2nd Refut.*, c. 3, sec. 5.; P.G. 99, col. 421, as quoted in Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, Palmer and Kadloubovsky, trans., St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1999, p. 37.

[18] Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Catherine%27s_Monastery

[19] Weitzmann, Kurt, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons. Volume One: From the Sixth to the Tenth Century*, Princeton University Press, NJ, 1976, p. 15.

[20] Eusebius, Vol. 1, pp. 85-107.

[21] *Synaxaristes*, Vol. 9 (August), pp. 549-570.