INTRODUCTION

O Caiaphas, Where Art Thou?

Joseph Caiaphas served as high priest of Judaea from 18–36/37 C.E., during the governorship of Pontius Pilate. As high priest Caiaphas would have lived and worked in Jerusalem, not far from the Temple, the cultic activities of which he supervised. One December morning, I set out from my Jerusalem tourist apartment to find "The House of Caiaphas," whose location was marked in bold letters on my map. Following the narrow streets and alleyways of the Old City, past small shops, markets, schools, and tour buses, I came upon a magnificent church, situated on a slope overlooking the Hinnom, Kidron, and Tyropean valleys. How easy it was to imagine Caiaphas taking his morning meal on the terrace, then setting out for his daily duties at the Temple, some two hundred meters to the northwest. In the crisp stillness of that Jerusalem day, I could almost hear the high priest chide the council for their lack of political acumen: "You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:49–50).

The church on the site of the House of Caiaphas is dedicated not to the high priest but to Peter. The bronze entrance doors, designed by a Palestinian Christian and sculpted by an Israeli artist, depict a poignant scene that takes place during Jesus' last supper. When Peter declares passionately that he is ready to accompany his Lord "to prison and to death," Jesus responds: "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me" (Luke 22:33–34).[1] In the church's main courtyard stands a life-size bronze Peter vehemently denying Jesus in the presence of two servant girls and a Roman

soldier. A crowing rooster perches on the top of the column against which Peter is leaning. Hence Saint Peter in Gallicantu—Saint Peter of the Crowing Rooster.

The Gospels state that Peter's denial took place in the courtyard of the high priest Caiaphas's dwelling.[2] But Caiaphas himself is present only in the caption of an outside mosaic (*Les Outrages de Caïphe*)[3] and at the margins of a crowded inside mosaic depicting Jesus' trial. My visit to the House of Caiaphas brought me face to face with Peter but kept hidden the high priest in whose courtyard Peter's failings were revealed (Matt. 26:70), in whose precincts Jesus may have been tried (Matt. 26:57), and in whose dungeon he may have been held in the hours before his execution (John 18:28).[4]

By the time I visited the Church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu in December 2008, the research for this book was nearly complete. The excursion crystallized for me the experience of searching for the historical Caiaphas, a figure who turned out to be much more elusive than I could have imagined.

THE DISAPPEARING HIGH PRIEST

Caiaphas looms large not only on tourist maps of Jerusalem's Old City but in the field of New Testament scholarship, especially in "life of Jesus" narratives and Gospel commentaries. For many scholars Caiaphas is the mastermind behind the plot to kill Jesus, the mediator between Judaea and Rome who aimed to defend his people against Roman aggression yet delivered one of his own into Roman hands. For some he is a bully who ran roughshod over the Jews in order to gain favor with Pilate. For others he is a pragmatic politician whose main concern was to maintain order in Judaea and thereby to keep the Roman legions away from the city and its holy temple.

Caiaphas's clear and distinct portrait in twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship made me optimistic that the historical Caiaphas could be found quite simply by first examining the primary sources, then evaluating scholars' interpretations of these sources, and finally taking a stand by agreeing with or modifying the consensus or, more dramatically, proposing a new reading altogether.

Alas, my hopes were quickly dashed. Certainly it did not take very long to gather the evidence: Caiaphas's name occurs twice in the works of the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, nine times in the New Testament, and twice on the sides of an ornate first-century ossuary that had been discovered in Jerusalem in 1990.[5] Upon closer examination, however, the powerful image drawn by histories and commentaries began to blur. That high priests were important in the biblical and Second Temple periods is abundantly clear from scriptural texts, as well as from extrabiblical and postbiblical sources. That Caiaphas was one of these high priests is also not in dispute. But beyond the fact of

his high priesthood, Caiaphas's personality and activities were far more difficult to discern than the scholarship implied.

The ossuary is of little assistance; archaeologists and historians are divided as to the question of whether this is truly the ossuary of the high priest.[6] Furthermore Josephus, a normally loquacious writer, reveals the beginning and end of Caiaphas's tenure as high priest but is entirely silent about everything else, including Caiaphas's background, his life prior to the high priesthood, and the events of his high priestly career.[7]

The authors of the New Testament Gospels and Acts, in contrast to Josephus, are intensely interested in Jesus, and therefore also in Jesus' relationships to those in the halls of power. Yet the New Testament mentions Caiaphas by name only nine times. Five of these references occur in John's Gospel, in which Caiaphas articulates the need for Jesus to die (11:49–52) but does little to bring about that outcome. Matthew's Gospel, which names the high priest twice, states that it was in Caiaphas's house that the chief priests and elders met to decide Jesus' fate. It does not specify, however, whether Caiaphas himself was present at the time (Matt. 26:3–5). Matthew later has Caiaphas preside over the interrogation of Jesus and tear his garments when Jesus declares: "From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" (26:64). Caiaphas then disappears from the story. Mark's Gospel includes the interrogation scene but does not refer to the presiding high priest by name (14:43–15:1). Luke's Gospel has no dramatic role for Caiaphas at all; he merely includes his name in the verse that establishes the historical context for the ministry of John the Baptist (3:1–2). The Acts of the Apostles names Caiaphas as one of the authorities who interrogate the apostles Peter and John after Jesus' death but does not single him out in any way (4:14–15). Furthermore Luke and John pair Caiaphas with his father-in-law, Annas, to whom they also refer as high priest (Luke 3:2; John 18:19). No text explicitly places Caiaphas at Jesus' trial before Pilate or at his crucifixion.

The well-defined scholarly portrait of the high priest was disintegrating before my very eyes. Josephus's silence, the relatively sparse, fragmentary, and even contradictory nature of the New Testament references. and the tantalizing but inconclusive identification of the ossuary made me despair of finding Caiaphas anywhere at all.

Of course historians do not "find" historical figures so much as construct them. Intertwined, then, with the question of who Caiaphas was and what he did is another question: how and why were the few traces of Caiaphas in ancient sources shaped into the powerful, pragmatic, and ruthless high priest of modern scholarship?

As I sought the historical Caiaphas, it became evident that he was by no means confined to first-century sources or the tomes of modern scholarship. In fact this high priest pops up everywhere: at the art gallery and the library, in the theater and on television. Indeed Caiaphas has had a long career in virtually every genre of creative expression from the first century to the twenty-first. Paintings, woodcuts, sculptures, and manuscript illuminations portray the high priest at the moment he rends his robe upon hearing Jesus' "blasphemy" (Matt. 26:65; Mark 14:63). Novels, plays, and movies cast Caiaphas as the archenemy who whips up the Jewish crowd against Jesus, cajoles and threatens Pontius Pilate into ordering Jesus' crucifixion, and smirks with satisfaction when his plan succeeds.

These portraits of Caiaphas are interesting, and sometimes even amusing; Caiaphas is not only a heavy-handed figure but also at times a buffoon. Most striking, however, is their extraordinary similarity to the Caiaphas of New Testament scholarship. It is not merely that creative representations of Caiaphas use the same sources as do New Testament scholars. It is also that the roles, motivations, and character traits that one finds in the corpus of creative works on the Jesus story are remarkably similar to those found in the corpus of historical and exegetical scholarship.

IMAGINATION AND NARRATIVE

What the scholarly and artistic depictions of Caiaphas have in common is imagination. It is obvious, of course, that imagination is key in media such as art, fiction, drama, and film. But as philosophers of history have long noted, imagination is also a necessary requirement for historiography. One of the most compelling writers on this topic is R. G. Collingwood, whose book *The Idea of History* is an extended reflection on the historical imagination.[8] Collingwood points out that historical thought, by definition, is always about absence: "events which have finished happening, and conditions no longer in existence."[9] While the past feels substantial to those who have experienced or studied a particular set of events, the past as such does not exist as an object nor even as an event, but only as an idea. Historical thinking therefore is "that activity of the imagination by which we endeavour to provide [the idea of the past] with detailed content."[10] And because it is an idea, the past does not reside in real time and space but in the mind. For Collingwood, therefore, "historical knowledge is the knowledge of what the mind has done in the past."[11] This is not passive knowledge. The historian is part of the process that he or she is studying,[12] precisely because it can occur only through the active use of the imagination.

The historical imagination entails a reenactment and thereby a "perpetuation of past acts in the present."[13] Collingwood concludes: "If then the historian has no direct or empirical knowledge of his facts, and no transmitted or testimoniary knowledge of them, what kind of knowledge has he: in other words, what must the historian do in order that he may know them? My historical review of the idea of history has resulted in the emergence of an answer to this question: namely, that the historian must re-enact the past in his own mind."[14]

If we adopt Collingwood's perspective, the similarities across "fictional" genres, such as literature, art, drama, and cinema, and "historical" genres, such as life-of-Jesus research and New Testament exegesis, should not surprise us. Collingwood remarks that historians and novelists alike

> construct a picture which is partly a narrative of events, partly a description of situations, exhibition of motives, analysis of characters. Each aims at making his picture a coherent whole, where every character and every situation is so bound up with the rest that this character in this situation cannot but act in this way, and we cannot imagine him as acting otherwise. The novel and the history must both of them make sense; nothing is admissible in either except what is necessary, and the judge of this necessity is in both cases the imagination. Both the novel and the history are self-explanatory, self-justifying, the product of an autonomous or self-authorizing activity; and in both cases this activity is the *a priori* imagination.[15]

If the imagination is so important in historical work, on what basis is it possible to distinguish between history and fiction? According to Collingwood, "The novelist has a single task only: to construct a coherent picture, one that makes sense. The historian has a double task: he has both to do this, and to construct a picture of things as they really were and of events as they really happened."[16] In our own postmodern era, more than six decades after Collingwood wrote these words, many are less confident in the ability of historians to picture "things as they really were." I would venture, however, that life-of-Jesus research still aspires to tell a story that accords in its outline and even details with the events that actually transpired.

The similarities between history and fiction rest not only on the exercise of the imagination but on the use of narrative as the vehicle for self-expression. The influential critical theorist Hayden White specifically addressed the narrative imperative in an article titled "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality."[17] White points out that "it is not enough that a historical account deal in real, rather than merely imaginary, events; and it is not enough that the account in its order of discourse represent events according to the

chronological sequence in which they originally occurred. The events must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, which they do not possess as mere sequence."[18] This structure is what is commonly called plot, that is, "a structure of relationships by which the events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an integrated whole."[19] Although we normally think of "plot" as a feature of fiction, drama, and film, it is characteristic of all narrative, including historiography.

RESURRECTING CAIAPHAS

Despite Collingwood's straightforward distinction between history and fiction, in practice it is not always easy or, indeed, possible to perceive clear boundaries between historiography and creative *Nachleben.* For example the New Testament Apocrypha contain numerous fanciful stories that sound completely fictitious to modern ears, yet it is possible, even likely, that their ancient audiences believed these events really happened.[20] In a more contemporary genre, Jesus movies contain fictional dialogue, characters, and scenes, yet are often judged according to their perceived historicity or absence thereof.[21] Even for Josephus and the New Testament, which are used as primary sources by later writers and artists, Caiaphas is an idea, a personage from the past who no longer exists but must be imagined. As such he can be molded and shaped to fit the stories into which they would place him: for Josephus the story of Jewish-Roman relations in the first century, and for the Evangelists the story of Jesus, the Christ, the son of God and agent of salvation for all humanity.

The imaginative depictions of Caiaphas are similar to the historiographical ones not only due to their narrative interests but also their shared contexts. Despite its self-referential tendencies, New Testament scholarship does not exist in a vacuum but is influenced by its political and religious contexts. The same is true of artistic expressions. An obvious factor across all genres has been changing societal views of the deicide charge. As public anti-Semitism has become less acceptable, especially after the Holocaust, the claim that (some or all) Jews killed Jesus is proclaimed much less vigorously than in earlier eras.[22] Furthermore there is both intentional and perhaps also inadvertent appropriation of concepts, portraits, and images across genre boundaries. Filmmakers and theater directors consult scholars; scholars use images found in art, drama, and film.

My search for Caiaphas began with history and moved to historiography and finally to representation; the narrative emerging from this search, however, will move in the opposite direction. The historical Caiaphas may ultimately elude any method of historical analysis, but there is another *histoire*—in the

French sense of story—that can be told. This is the story of how less than a dozen references in first-century sources have been pieced together, embellished, amplified, and given new life in works of scholarship and imagination over the course of two millennia.

A NARRATIVE OF DEICIDE

This book contends that Caiaphas's migration from the margins of the primary sources to the center of subsequent retellings is shaped by the narrative imperative, that is, the need to select sources and fill in the gaps of the Gospel accounts in order to create a coherent story line. Sometimes these gaps are filled in with material from biblical and postbiblical sources, sometimes from other materials, and sometimes from pure imagination. The ways in which the gaps are filled are by no means neutral. Rather they frequently reflect an evaluation, whether implicit or overt, of Caiaphas's nature and behavior as a "good," "bad," "tragic," or "comic" figure. There is only one criterion that is used for this evaluation: the high priest's relationship and interactions with Jesus, which, however, must themselves be constructed on the basis of the same meager sources. The assessment of Caiaphas's moral status, in turn, is often closely related to the way in which the narrative construes the role of (some, many, or just a few) Jews in the death of Jesus. And this construction will depend at least in part on whether, to what degree, and in what ways anti-Semitic statements and behaviors are acceptable in the public sphere. If Collingwood is correct in his assertion that the historical imagination entails a reenactment and thereby the "perpetuation of past acts in the present,"[23] then portraits of Caiaphas are not mere imaginative explorations but can, and do, have implications in the real world.

The first two chapters look closely at the primary sources that are the foundation for both the historiographical and the nonhistorical representations of the high priest Caiaphas. Chapter 1 takes Josephus's references to Caiaphas as its starting point. Sparse though his treatment of the high priest may be, Josephus testifies to the historical and political framework within which Caiaphas operated. Other aspects of Caiaphas's lifestyle and his role in Jewish society can be pieced together from the array of biblical and postbiblical sources about the high priest and high priesthood more generally. In the Bible the high priest is first and foremost a cultic leader, responsible for overseeing the daily, weekly, and annual sacrifices. He, and only he, was allowed to enter the Temple's Holy of Holies, and then only on one day a year, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and for only one purpose: to atone for his sins and the sins of the people.

Although his cultic roles remained fundamentally the same, the status of the high priest and the high priesthood changed significantly over time. Such

changes may have affected his depictions in first-century sources. Chapter 2 looks in detail at the references to Caiaphas in the New Testament Gospels and Acts of the Apostles. The Gospels were often used by ancient and premodern interpreters as straightforward historical evidence for Caiaphas and his role in Jesus' Passion. But New Testament scholars have long recognized that, while the Gospels and Acts include references to historical personages and to historical events, their narratives are profoundly shaped by the aims, experiences, and contexts of their authors. Although these narratives focus on the early decades of the first century, when the Temple was still standing, the texts themselves were written in the later part of the first century, after the Temple was destroyed.[24] This dual perspective may well have influenced the Evangelists' views of the high priest and his role in Jesus' life story. Chapter 2 assesses the historical value of these sources by inquiring into precisely what their authors knew about the "actual" Caiaphas and considering the role that the historical imagination played in the role they assign to the high priest in their narratives of Jesus.

As chapter 3 shows, the narrative development of Caiaphas that began in the New Testament continued on after the canonical Gospels and Acts were completed. Indeed some of the most thoughtful and imaginative reflections on Caiaphas appear in the writings of the church fathers and the New Testament Apocrypha. For the fathers of the church, Caiaphas represented all that was evil, and could therefore stand in for all groups and individuals whom the fathers saw as a threat to their own understanding of Christ. Just as the high priest plotted the death of Jesus, so did the "heretics" plot the death of the church. Origen, among others, wrestled with the question of how someone as wicked as Caiaphas could nonetheless utter a true prophecy. The New Testament Apocrypha tell fanciful tales about the high priest, almost always pairing him closely with Annas, his father-in-law. These narratives do not so much retell the Gospel story per se as fashion stories around it or address exegetical, theological, and conceptual issues raised by the Gospel accounts themselves. The apocryphal books as well as the writings of the church fathers reveal that already at this point the deicide charge was accepted without question, as was Caiaphas's role as the principal villain of the piece.

The following three chapters consider Caiaphas in literature, drama, and film. These chapters show that Caiaphas's reputation as a wicked deicide is both maintained and challenged, in the context of changing discourses about the role of the Jews in the life and death of Jesus and the acceptability, or lack thereof, of public expressions of anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic sentiments.[25] They also illustrate the high priest's usefulness as a figure through whom artists and writers could poke fun at ecclesiastical and political authorities in their own times.

Chapter 4 looks at literary portraits of Caiaphas. Although the high priest is mentioned in a number of famous poems, his principal literary career has been in fictional retellings of the Jesus story. Over the centuries literally hundreds of novels about Jesus have been written, in numerous languages. In this chapter I sample a few of these treatments and then compare and contrast the portraits of two twentieth-century works: *The Nazarene,* by the American Jewish writer Sholem Asch, published in 1939, and Dorothy Sayers's radio play cycle, *The Man Born to Be King* (1942–43), in which Caiaphas plays the oily, but occasionally thoughtful, ecclesiastical politician. Given that they were written in the Nazi era, these two works highlight the complex role of anti-Semitism in the representation of the high priest.

Chapter 5 looks at Caiaphas's stage career in English mystery cycles and in the European Passion play tradition. The Oberammergau Passion play is both famous and infamous. It is famous because of its popularity and longevity; it has been performed to sold-out audiences almost every decade from 1634 to the present. It is infamous, however, because of its connection to the Nazi regime. Hitler came to see the play twice, in 1930 and 1934, and praised it highly as a fine illustration of the perfidy of the Jews. Since the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, the play has been revised several times, primarily in order to address issues of anti-Semitism. In this chapter I compare the portrait of Caiaphas in successive recent versions of the script used for the productions at Oberammergau.

Although the Passion play is still being performed in Oberammergau and other locations,[26] since the late nineteenth century it is cinema that has provided the broadest access to Caiaphas and the other players in the Jesus story. Chapter 6 examines the genre of Jesus films, which began as an attempt to bring Passion plays to a mass audience but quickly developed in its own directions. This chapter focuses on the ways in which the depictions of Caiaphas reflect the views of the filmmakers about the Jewish role in Jesus' death. In film, as in fiction and drama, the deicide charge and anti-Semitism come to the fore.

In chapter 7 the study turns from fiction to historiography. The differing historical narratives reflect diverse theories about the three-way relationship between the high priest, the Roman governor, and Jesus. While there are some who believe that the entire Jewish trial is a fabrication, most historical narratives assign to Caiaphas a significant role in devising and carrying out the plot against Jesus' life. Many historians argue that Caiaphas was responsible for maintaining order on behalf of Pilate, who spent most of his time in Caesarea. In this scenario Caiaphas was concerned that Jesus' actions, particularly in and around the Temple, would cause unrest, and therefore the high priest moved against him, using the means—intrigue and a rigged trial—at his disposal. The historiography also reflects different perspectives on and evaluations of the high

priest. These differences, however, focus not so much on the events themselves but on the factors that led Caiaphas to take action against Jesus. Historical and exegetical discussions of Caiaphas are expressed in the modes of discourse that characterize historical-critical scholarship, including long discussions of New Testament passages and interactions with other scholars (a mode of discourse adopted by the present book as well). Nevertheless the similarities to the narratives told in literature, drama, and film will be obvious.

The mere fact that historical reconstructions make ample use of the imagination, are shaped by their contexts, and are subject to the narrative imperative does not mean, of course, that they are wrong about the personages and events that they attempt to bring to life. Chapter 8 engages in a detailed evaluation of some of the main points on which scholars agree: that Caiaphas was motivated at least in part by the requirement that high priests keep order on behalf of Rome and by Jesus' actions in the so-called Temple cleansing. Plausible as these points are in the context of narratives that require coherence and causality, close examination of the sources shows that they too, like the high priest himself, are difficult to pin down.

The final chapter argues that instead of lamenting the high priest's historical elusiveness, we simply accept that the only way to encounter Caiaphas is through his many representations. Novels, scripts, and screenplays are helpful, but perhaps the best way to come face to face with Caiaphas is through his visual representation. This chapter samples the visual Caiaphas, as portrayed in art, drama, and film, and considers some responses to "seeing" the high priest (or perhaps better, to seeing the "high priest") from the biblical period to the present.

The historical Caiaphas is entangled in the story of his emergence from obscurity to renown. Also embedded in the story are many other narratives. Each era, each genre, and each work of imagination and history has its own stories, from the struggle of emerging orthodox Christianity against those whom it labeled as heretics to the struggle of the directors of Oberammergau 2010 to overcome the anti-Semitism that pervades the script that they have inherited. Throughout this study I have remained fascinated by the interplay between presence and absence, the overt and the covert, and text and imagination, and the powerful force that narrative exerts on storytellers in all genres. At the same time, I have been dismayed at Caiaphas's lengthy reputation as a deicide, which raises serious questions about the role of narrative and representation in the perpetuation of anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic sentiments. It is my hope that the readers of this book will be drawn, as I have been, into both the pleasures and the challenges of seeking the historical, and the not-so-historical, Joseph Caiaphas, high priest of Judaea.