

Response to James R. Lewis's chapter 3, "Jesus in India and the Forging of Tradition," in his book, *Legitimizing New Religions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 73-88

James W. Deardorff
September, 2009

In 1939 Elizabeth Caspari and her friend, Mrs. Gasque, were the last outsiders to be granted the privilege of seeing the Tibetan book containing the "Lost Years" writing, while they had stopped for a few days at the Hemis monastery near Leh, Ladakh, on their sojourn with their travel party through India, Kashmir and Tibet. One of them took a photo of the lama librarian holding the book, made of sheets of parchment, after he and two other monks had surprised them by bringing it to them to look at. The librarian told them, simply, "These books say your Jesus was here." Neither woman had heard of it before, and so they had not asked to see it. They didn't know about the brief controversy over its existence that flared up after Nicholas Notovitch had discovered it back in 1887, when he obtained a substantial French translation from it, which he published in 1894 as *La Vie inconnue de Jésus-Christ* and in 1895 as *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*, transl. V. Crispe (London: Hutchinson and Co.). The primary sources of information on the matter comes from this book by Notovitch and the later comprehensive study of the matter by Elizabeth Clare Prophet (these and further references also given in J. R. Lewis's book, or in my website, www.tjresearch.info/ecumensm.htm).

Lewis starts his vilification of the Jesus-in-India topic by casting doubt on Elizabeth Caspari's mental acuity.

From Lewis's book, p. 74: **And contrary to the rather dramatic retelling of the event in Prophet's book, Caspari was apparently not cognizant of the importance of her find. Not only did she not bother to take some pictures of the manuscript, but she also failed to make further inquiries.** She or her friend did take at least the one photo presented that showed the librarian holding the book; it displays the text of a top sheet of parchment, but with too distant a view to allow us any chance of translating it. Lewis's "**did not bother**" here does not take into account that neither Madam Caspari nor Mrs. Gasque were biblical scholars, neither had apparently even heard of this manuscript before, neither had apparently heard of Notovitch's book or the prompt debunking of it by Prof. Max Müller, and both were taken totally by surprise by the monk's statement. So they had no background from which to know that they should have pressed the librarian to allow them close-up photos of sheet after sheet. If they had asked for this, however, it's unlikely that the monks would have allowed it, as any publication of the results, the librarian would know, could lead to grave danger to their library and monastery. Showing the book briefly to a couple of unaware Western ladies who had not come there for the purpose of researching it, decades after the initial furor over it had been squelched, was probably as far as the librarian would have dared to go. Somehow, Lewis missed this context. Further, we don't know whether or not the two ladies made any further inquiries of the librarian; Lewis assumed they didn't, and expressed that assumption as if it were fact.

Lewis did not attempt to belittle Madam Caspari any further, perhaps because she went on to become one of the founders and an organizer of the Montessori school system.

P. 74: **Caspari's story is part of a century-old tradition...** Here Lewis is asserting that the tradition is only about one century old. However, it's undoubtedly an older tradition than that, and older than Notovitch's era. It's well documented that Jawarhar Nehru wrote his daughter, Indira, in a 1932 letter: "All over Central Asia, in Kashmir and Ladakh and Tibet and even farther north, there is still a strong belief that Jesus or Isa traveled about there." The normal supposition would be that a tradition still strong over a large region would date back centuries—centuries before 1932. This tradition may include the post-crucifixion Jesus-in-India tradition as well as the "Lost Years" tradition, one doesn't know. I have no reason to suspect that news of Notovitch's discovery and his book had spread all over central Asia in just 35 years to become a tradition; besides, the tradition is about Jesus in India, not Notovitch or the manuscript at Hemis.

Lewis himself allows, on his p. 87, that as indicated in a 1929 writing by Nicholas Roerich, the Jesus-in-India tradition lay within "the consciousness of the whole East." This also implies a centuries-old tradition as of that date.

Both the present and previous Shankaracharya of Puri, at the Juggernaut temple, are on record as saying that they know from ancient records held at the temple that Isa/Jesus had spent some time in India in association with some of India's "illuminated sages," before commencing his Palestinian ministry. (A shankaracharya is the head of a Hindu monastic region.)

Being so well supported, the tradition should not have been called a "tale" by Lewis, on this and subsequent pages.

P. 74: Lewis says the Hemis manuscript was **clearly a forged document**. But he hasn't yet at this point attempted to show it. The tactic of putting the reader in the desired frame of mind in advance reminds me of the Gospels wherein the apostles are named, and Judas is pegged as a betrayer chapters ahead of the event.

Lewis fails to state an alternative but obvious reason why Notovitch and Abhedananda spoke out on the discovery and confirmation, respectively—they felt that the basic truth should be told.

P. 76: **Despite the fact that he [Issa/Jesus] is supposedly learning much from his Hindu mentors, in his sermons he emphatically denies the authority of the Vedas...** (my underline). It's logical that Issa had to first learn the language, and then learn and understand all about the Vedas from his mentors, before he would be in any position to speak out against the Vedas, as in V.12. Thus I see no logical reason for Lewis having cast doubt, by adding "supposedly," on Issa having learned from his mentors how to read and understand the Vedas.

Notovitch used the spelling "Issa" in his book, which is the Muslim word for "Jesus" (as noted by Lewis, p. 78), which likely derives from the Sanskrit word "Isha," which in turn means "Lord" (see *Swami Abhedananda's Journey into Kashmir and Tibet*, p. 122, n.2). "Isa" is another spelling of "Issa." The earliest known version of the Hemis manuscript is said to have been written in Pali, a language closely related to Sanskrit. Later, after the manuscript was brought from India to Nepal to Tibet, one or more copies were translated into Tibetan, the language of the manuscript viewed at Hemis monastery.

A designation such as V.12 above refers to the chapter-and-verse labeling that Notovitch gave to his translation and ordering of the Hemis manuscript, which he entitled, "The Life of Saint Issa." Abhedananda used the same verse-number labeling in his translation.

P. 76: **Jesus preaches against the doctrine of reincarnation.** The Hemis manuscript really doesn't say that. At VI.11 Issa speaks out against transmigration "*into the body of an animal.*" From following verses VI.12,14 it should be clear that "animal" is used here in the sense of an animal lower than the human being. So contrary to Lewis's assertion, the implication is that Issa did teach transmigration to other humans (i.e., reincarnation), just not to animals. It may seem somewhat surprising that he didn't speak more on reincarnation, and more definitively, but then again he had nothing at all to say about the doctrine of resurrection, which he would likely have known about from early studies of Pharisaic beliefs in Palestine. Also, we know nothing about who authored this Hemis manuscript except what we can surmise from the manuscript itself. I would surmise that he may have been a Deist-leaning Buddhist who, like many Buddhists, don't speak of reincarnation nearly as definitively as Hindus. Also, it is clear that he felt very sympathetic towards the Jewish people, as Lewis pointed out.

P. 76: **In 1922 he [Swami Abhedananda] went to Hemis monastery, where he is said to have read the same book Notovitch transcribed in 1887** (my underline). Neither in Elizabeth Clare Prophet's book, nor in Abhedananda's book, does it say the Swami *read* the same book. The "book" was in Tibetan, which we may conclude he couldn't read; Abhedananda clearly stated that it was with the help of the lama that he got a portion of it translated.

P. 76: **Abhedananda deleted the anti-Hindu tone** found in Notovitch's book. The word "deleted" here is misleading, as it implies that while copying from Notovitch's book, Abhedananda altered or deleted words at will. Instead, Abhedananda and/or his collaborator decided not to include, in the Swami's 1954 book *Kashmir O Tibbate*, published 15 years after his death, large sections he had obtained at Hemis in translated form that contained verses offensive to Hindu tastes. So it was primarily by omission of his own anti-Hindu findings, which apparently confirmed those of Notovitch, that Abhedananda removed the anti-Hindu tone. Abhedananda's 1987 book, in English, also leaves out the anti-Hindu verses or sections, which are: V.6-26, VI.1-2...VI.11... He also omitted all of VIII.2 through XIV, which mainly discusses the original author's impressions of key events in Jesus' Palestinian ministry and subsequent crucifixion. Also omitted was all of III, which speaks of the shortcomings of the Hebrews, and all of VII, which speaks against paganism and thus condemns Hindu paganistic practices as well.

However, the editor of Abhedananda's 1987 version of the book did include all of Notovitch's verses, appended at the rear. Thus it includes all the anti-Hindu material that Abhedananda himself apparently resisted publishing.

P. 77 (and 85): **Levi Dowling's *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ...* was clearly indebted to Notovitch.** Lewis is accusing Dowling of plagiarizing Notovitch's material.

But Lewis hasn't proven that there is no such thing as Akashic Records, which some persons, like Dowling, say they are able to partially access.

P. 77: **The [Hemis] manuscript... was never accessible to more than a few outsiders.** Here the reader should be informed that the Buddhist custodians of this literature, with the benefit of hindsight and experience, were very reluctant to make it accessible to Christians or Muslims who might (prematurely) run off with it or destroy it or the library.

P. 77: Lewis says that **there are simply too many improbabilities for Notovitch's original narrative to be literally true.** Here Lewis should have clarified whether he was speaking of Notovitch's lengthy narrative of his entire trip to Hemis, or of just the manuscript itself, or both. If speaking of the manuscript, it may not be literally true throughout, without that invalidating the basis of its underlying story. If so, that would make it akin to the canonical Gospels and other Christian writings, much of which most scholars do not accept as being literally true throughout, while not contesting that there was a man called Jesus who administered to the inhabitants of Israel. If speaking of Notovitch's lengthy narrative, Lewis would need to spell out what parts of it he finds improbable and why.

P. 77-78: Here Lewis says that **the Juggernath temple... appears to have been Jesus' destination**, and lists this as a piece of false information because the present temple was not built until much later (namely in the 12th century CE, and its predecessor temple around 950 CE). However, the Hemis manuscript, either from Notovitch's version or Abhedananda's, says nothing about a temple or the temple (V.3,5). Lewis's remark was uncalled for. Furthermore, according to an article by C. B. Patel, "Oldest Jagannath Temple of Puri: The Buddhist and Samavamsi Connections" (*Orissa Review* magazine, July, 2003), "Many scholars believe the Buddhist origin of Jagannath and opine that Puri was an ancient seat of Buddhist cult." They find that long before, the temple site appears to have been an ancient Buddhist stupa (monastery), which probably housed sacred Buddhist relics including the celebrated Buddha's Tooth relics. Not implausibly, sacred texts, including writings about Isa's travels and stay there, would have been stored there as well.

78. **Other incorrect items of data include the assertion that the Buddhists are monotheists, "worshipping the one and sublime Brahma" (Notovitch 1907, VI.2).** The text doesn't say that. Instead, it says that Issa established himself "in the country of Guatamides, in the midst of a people worshipping the one and sublime Brahma." (VI.2), (my underline). The people at that time in the region of the Buddha's birthplace shouldn't be construed as representing all of Buddhism, which of course was not one uniform religion five centuries after its origin. If not a Deist, the writer of the Hemis manuscript seems to have regarded the Creator god Brahma at least as the most important god (as in henotheism).

P. 78: **The narrative fails to support... that Jesus received his training among the masters of the East.** Here Lewis is assuming that Issa would accept and agree with all that he was taught by the Masters of the East. However, verse IV.13 doesn't necessarily imply that Issa would accept as valid *all* the "training" he would receive, or that his initial aim of "perfecting himself in the Divine Word," as interpreted within Hinduism, would remain

his objective after learning all about Hinduism for himself. The verse also states that Issa's aim was to study the laws of the great Buddhas. In view of the overall context, this need not be construed into his having been indoctrinated into Buddhism/Hinduism, and of accepting all his "training" at face value. Instead, it appears that he utilized perceptivity in concluding what was true and what wasn't.

The main point of the text is that Issa found much of what he observed and was taught to be wrong (though undoubtedly finding much else to be valuable). But before he could conclude this, he had to learn the language, study what the Buddhas professed, study the Vedas, etc. Christians should be able to understand the plausibility of this, as Jesus had studied the Hebrew Scriptures and learned what the Pharisees and scribes taught, yet espoused strong differences from much of it (e.g., Mt 16:6,11-12; chapter 23).

Hence Lewis's conclusion here, that the Hemis manuscript **does not tell us anything about the historical Jesus**, is mistaken, being based on "black-and-white" reasoning and the assumption that Issa had no perceptive ability and no other sources of knowledge than what he received from the masters in the East. Likewise his conclusion that the Hemis manuscript **must have been written by someone in the West, almost certainly by [Notovitch]**, does not follow from the data, but apparently from apologetic Western reasoning like this: The manuscript just *has* to be a forgery, otherwise it would be too upsetting for Christianity. Therefore one is justified in assuming what would satisfy a Christian skeptic in order to portray it as a forgery .

P. 78: **Mirza Ghulam Ahmad... seems to have been the first person [in 1899] to claim to have found Jesus' grave in Srinagar.** However, in Kashmir near Srinagar, there is a monument in stone: the Throne of Solomon, bearing four inscriptions, the last two of which are most interesting though they were mutilated following the conquest of Kashmir by the Sikhs in 1819. Fortunately, they were described by the early Muslim historian of Kashmir, Mulla Nadiri, in 1413. An English translation of his Persian script is: "At this time Yuz Asaf proclaimed his prophethood. Year fifty and four [in the reign of King Gopadatta]," and "He is Jesus, prophet of the Children of Israel." Although the correct dating and significance of the year 54 is not clear, it has been placed within the reign of King Gopadatta at 107 CE by Holger Kersten, author of *Jesus Lived in India*, and at 78 CE by Professor Fida Hassnain, director of archives and antiquities in Kashmir. The main source is from Mulla Nadiri's, *Tarikh-i-Kashmir*, a 1413 manuscript in possession of Ghulam Mohy-ud-Din Wanchu, Srinagar. See K. N. Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, (Woking, England: Woking Muslim Mission & Literary Trust, 1952) pp. 369-370, 400. In the inscription, "Children of Israel" refers to the Bani-Israel, those numerous residents of Kashmir, northern India and Afghanistan whose characteristics and culture appear to have derived from Semitic ancestry. Indeed, several researchers conclude that they represent parts of the ten lost tribes of ancient Israel; e.g., see George Moore, *The Lost Tribes* (London: Longman Green, 1861).

These sources greatly predate Mirza Gulam Ahmad's 1899 book, and similarly could not have been influenced by Notovitch's finding.

In addition, some written and oral tradition assert that after death Yuz Asaf was entombed in the old section of Srinagar, in Anzimar in the Khanjar quarter. See Abu Muhammad Haji Mohyud-Din, *Tarikh-i-Kabir-i-Kashmir* (Amritsar, India: Suraj Parkash

Press, 1903) pp. 34-35. See also K. N. Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, pp. 373-374, 399.

Pp. 78-79: **Notovitch, who passes through Srinagar during his 1887 trip, never mentions anything about the later Jesus-in-India tradition. This indicates... the story of Jesus' life and burial in Kashmir originated after Notovitch's time.** The above references already indicate the fallacy of this conclusion by Lewis. His reasoning here, in addition, is faulty, as many people have passed through Srinagar since Notovitch's time without being aware of the tomb of Yuz Asaf (alias Jesus) in Anzimar in the Khanjar quarter. (As skeptics are fond of saying, "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.") One needs to know both where it is located in the city, to know that Yuz Asaf was Jesus, and then be prepared to investigate the tradition if one runs into it, in order to ascertain its degree of authenticity, before reporting one's find. Notovitch was one of those who was apparently unaware; Madam Caspari was another. The writer of the Hemis manuscript, probably a Buddhist, was himself unaware, apparently, of Issa's survival of the crucifixion and later travel to Srinagar.

Among further evidence of the tradition, there is O. M. Burke's finding from along the Silk Road: Within northwest Afghanistan, centered in the city of Herat, Burke, an explorer of Sufism, came across a sect of some 1000 people who are devotees of Yuz Asaf, whom they also knew as Isa, son of Maryam [see *Among the Dervishes* (London: Octagon Press, 1976), p. 107]. Their tradition includes Isa, the prophet from Israel, having escaped the cross, traveled to India and settled in Kashmir. He was regarded as possessing the power to perform miracles. The sect's leader at that time (1976), Abba Yahiyya (Father John), could recite the names of the succession of their leaders and teachers back through nearly 60 generations to Yuz Asaf himself, when he had stopped off there along the Silk Road.

P. 79: **No one ever seriously proposed a connection between India and Jesus prior to Notovitch.** This has already been falsified in discussion of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad above. In addition, the Hindu literature known as the *Bhavishya Maha Purana* contains some ten verses indicating that Jesus was in Kashmir during the reign of King Shalivahan, which has been placed within 39 to 50 CE. K. N. Ahmad dates the writing of these verses to 115 CE.

P. 79: **Though we can safely conclude that *The Life of Saint Issa* is a forgery....** Here Lewis has, as on p. 74, jumped to a conclusion which he has not proven, and which we have shown is unjustified.

P. 81: **Though at least nominally a member of the Russian Orthodox Church, Notovitch's background was Jewish, strongly suggesting a very personal motive for turning the ancient Romans into "Christ killers," rather than blaming the Jewish people.** However, as noted by Lewis's source, Elizabeth Clare Prophet, *The Lost Years of Jesus* (Livingston, MT: Summit University Press, 1984; p. 12), Notovitch "was probably a convert since a brief entry in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* notes that his brother... was born Jewish but converted to the Greek Orthodox Church as a youth." So Nicholas Notovitch is presumed to have converted at an early age also. A convert to another religion is at least as likely to

side with the religion he adopts than the one he leaves behind. Instead, the sympathy expressed for the Jewish people in the manuscript is best attributed to its ancient author.

P. 84: **Had Abhedananda found a real text at Hemis containing the ideas expressed in his *In Kashmir and Tibet*, he would certainly have broadcast his findings to the widest possible audience... for the reasons mentioned above. That he did not is strong evidence that the Swami never, in fact, laid eyes on such a manuscript.** Instead, what the facts much more strongly suggest is: Abhedananda found that the text at Hemis essentially confirmed what Notovitch had found, while being disapproving of much of Hinduism. This disapproval included warnings against the veracity of the texts called the Vedas and the Puranas, against the Jaines, against the Brahmans and Kshatriyas; Issa had even denied the reality of the Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva triad of gods, and denied any reality to transmigration of the soul into lower animals. It is no wonder, then, that the Swami chose to omit all of that in his 1929 book, also omitted in its later 1953 version, *In Kashmir and Tibet*, written in Bengali, which appeared 14 years after Abhedananda's death. The Swami had written the first version in collaboration with his attendant, Brahmachari Bhairab Chaitanya, who made extensive use of Abhedananda's detailed diary of their journey into Kashmir and Tibet, and of articles the Swami wrote about his trip that had been published in a monthly Bengali magazine. (Chaitanya is another witness to the Swami's findings, having been his constant attendant during their travels.) All this is detailed in the Preface of Swami Abhedananda's 1987 book: *Journey into Kashmir and Tibet*, trans. A. Dasgupta & K. B. Kundu (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math). It is to the credit of the late editor of the 1987 edition, Swami Prajnanananda of Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, that he included the full set of Notovitch's "Lost Years" verses, to show that Abhedananda's findings confirmed them, even though the full set was unfavorable towards much of Hinduism.

Here is an incomplete list of those who Lewis must claim are hoaxers or liars in his attempt to dispel the Jesus-in-India evidence and tradition:

- O. M. Burke, 1976, who learned of the sect centered at Herat, Afghanistan, which has kept their memories of the tradition alive over the centuries;
- Sri Bharati Krishna Tirtha, in 1959 the Shankaracharya of Puri, who knew the tradition from having studied ancient records in the Puri Jagannath Temple archives; (see Sri Daya Mata, "Remembering Paramahansa Yogananda," in *Self-Realization Magazine*, Winter, 1992, p.16);
- Swami Nischalananda Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of Puri in 2008, who confirmed the preceding information (see Edward T. Martin, *Jesus in India: King of Wisdom*; Reno, NV: Yellow Hat Publishing, 2008, pp. 105-6);
- Notovitch in 1887 (or else the librarian at Hemis who read the "Lost Years" verses to Notovitch's translator);
- Swami Abhedananda during 1922-1929;
- his attendant, Brahmachari Bhairab Chaitanya, during 1922-1929;
- Jawarhar Nehru, 1932;
- Elizabeth Caspari and Mrs. Clarence Gasque (or the librarian who showed them the book);

- Edward F. Noack, in the late 1970s, or the monk at Hemis monastery who told him of the manuscripts in their library (see Prophet, 1984, opposing p. 345);
- The several Muslim historians who, several or many centuries ago, wrote about portions of the Jesus-in-India tradition; they had no strong reason to stay silent about this information.

On the other hand, one needs only to assume that the writer of the Gospel of Luke added just one sentence to his sources in order to try to fill in for Jesus' missing years of from about age 13 to 25 or 30, namely Lk 2:52, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man." However, that did not require much creativity to write, because one finds, in 1 Sam 2:26, "Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men." This Lukan case appears to be one in which the saying, "Absence of evidence is evidence of absence" holds true.

And if the tradition is true, one must also assume that the librarian/monk whom J. Archibald Douglas queried at Hemis lied when telling him that Notovitch had never been there. After realizing the furor that was stirred up after Notovitch's book came out in 1894, it is not surprising that the head librarian would fear for the safety of the relevant books, the library and the monastery itself if he were to confirm that Notovitch had been there and acquired a translation of the "Jesus-in-India" writings.