

What did Jesus look like? Science is still trying to solve the mystery

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Was he blond like Brad Pitt? Was he black like Kanye "Yeezus" West?

Just what did Jesus Christ look like?

No one knows. But news of a recent attempt to answer that question has resurfaced in these days leading up to the celebration of his birth.

In case you missed it, British scientists and Israeli archeologists earlier this year used forensic anthropology, the kind typically used to solve crimes, to recreate what was described as the most accurate image of the most famous face in history.

Their Jesus has dark short hair, a mustache and beard.

It looks nothing like a Eurocentric Jesus.

It looks nothing like "The Head of Christ," one of the most recognizable images of Jesus painted by Christian artist Warner Sallman in 1940 and reproduced hundreds of millions of times on greeting cards and prayer cards alike.

Sallman's iconic Jesus is white, blond and blue-eyed as opposed to modern-day depictions showing Jesus with darker skin, darker hair, darker eyes - truer to the people of his day.

"Given the profound effect he has had on human history, it's

understandable that there would be so much curiosity around the face of the man who has billions of followers worldwide," Discovery News noted on Monday.

"Artistic portrayals of Jesus have seemingly come to a consensus, though the image of Jesus has changed over the centuries."

It's not just Jesus' skin tone that has changed. Historically, Jesus has had a number of hairstyles, too - long and flowing in Byzantine icons, short and curly in this latest incarnation.

Jesus has a beard, he is beardless.

Jesus has blue eyes. He has brown eyes.

Jesus smiles. He is stern-faced.

In May, Italian police released a photo of what they said Jesus looked like as a young boy, an image created using the Shroud of Turin and computer forensics. British media reported that the police employed the same forensic techniques used to catch Mafia bosses.

It's not as if the Bible offers clues to what Jesus looked like, with references to his physical appearance largely nonexistent, vague at best.

"Jesus is the best-known figure of history, but in many ways he is also the least known," writes D. Moody Smith, professor emeritus of New Testament at Duke University Divinity School.

"Most ancient bioi (Greek plural of the word for 'life'), like modern biographies, describe the subject's appearance. Even Old Testament descriptions of King David, for example, allude to his physical attractiveness.

"But the New Testament Gospels contain no reference to Jesus' appearance, much less a description of him. We don't know what he looked like."

Artists have depicted the baby Jesus since at least the fourth century. But among the earliest depictions of an older Jesus ever discovered is a fresco dating back to 235 A.D. found in a Syrian synagogue. The artwork, named the "Healing of the Paralytic," shows Jesus with short, curly hair wearing a tunic and sandals.

The portrait of Jesus as a bearded, long-haired man began to emerge in the early fourth century, a portrayal inspired by Greek and Roman gods that eventually became the most commonly depicted adult Jesus, according to Discovery.

It was a bearded Jesus, for instance, depicted in frescoes discovered in 2010 in catacombs near St. Paul's Basilica in Rome, believed to be the earliest depiction of Jesus with his 12 apostles.

The most recent portrait released earlier this year was created using forensic data from the skulls of first-century Jewish men from around Galilee in northern Israel.

Richard Neave, a British anatomical artist retired from the University of Manchester, used clay models, computerized X-rays and drawings of men from the region and Jesus' time to reimagine his face, coloration and hair, according to Mic.

"Over the past two decades, he had reconstructed dozens of famous faces, including Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great, and King Midas of Phrygia," wrote Popular Mechanics in January when it published these new findings.

"If anyone could create an accurate portrait of Jesus, it would be Neave."

Even though the portrait was published earlier this year, it somehow found new life on the Internet in recent days, when "Jesus Christ" briefly became a trending topic Monday on Twitter and Facebook.

Noted Popular Mechanics when it first unveiled this new image: "For those accustomed to traditional Sunday school portraits of Jesus, the sculpture of the dark and swarthy Middle Eastern man that emerges from Neave's laboratory is a reminder of the roots of their faith."

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