

Christian Forgery in Jewish Antiquities

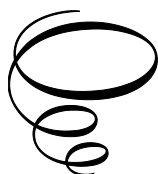
Christian Forgery in Jewish Antiquities:

Josephus Interrupted

By

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**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-5527-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-5527-3

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would do well to initiate this book with a declaration of sincere humility and an all-encompassing apology for any possible oversight as regards accountable academic rigour.

In this context, nothing that is contained in the following pages would have been even remotely possible without the enormous and tireless contributions made by the huge number of variously talented individuals over many centuries, some of whom will never be correctly acknowledged for their important contributions to this important debate. In this context, this study, which at best marks a small stage in an ever-continuing process of deliberation and review, belongs to them all.

With reference to McGarry (1955: 167) one may be reminded of the celebrated confession of Bernard of Chartres (active 1115–1124 C.E.) who was quoted, as far back as 1159, by John of Salisbury (c. 1120–1180 C.E.):

Bernard of Chartres used to say that we are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, so that we can see more than they, and things at a greater distance, not by virtue of any sharpness of sight on our part, or any physical distinction, but because we are carried high and raised up by their giant size.

The number of individuals who played a vital role in this study are too numerous to mention without offending someone who might be inadvertently overlooked.

Thus, with great fear of oversight, I would like to draw attention to but a select few of the many, who each in their own way, contributed to the completion of this research project and have earned my most grateful appreciation:

My sincerest thanks go to my most recent *Doktorvater*, mentor and most excellent and erudite of sounding boards, Prof. Dr Pierre Johan Jordaan. In addition, I need to acknowledge the collective wisdom and insights of my friends and colleagues within the Faculty of Theology (Potchefstroom Campus) of the NWU (North-West University), including: Prof. Dr Marianne Dircksen, Dr Johan Steenkamp, Dr Ds. Jacobus de Bruyn and Dr At Lamprecht.

I am also very appreciative of Dr Tom Larney (former Director of the NWU's Ferdinand Postma Library) who helped me to enlarge and enrich the Faculty of Theology's library collection with a substantial range of more contemporary Christian scholarship. Last but not least, I am most indebted to my wife, Iris Marié Allen for her moral support, encouragement and phenomenal editorial skills.

10th May 2020

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations for Cited Biblical and Classical Works

The following abbreviations are employed for all cited Biblical/Scriptural and Classical Works. For the purposes of consistency and standardisation, all abbreviations of works and authors will follow, as closely as possible, a system originally proposed by Liddell and Scott¹.

Plato (c. 425–c. 347 B.C.E.)	
Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Res Publica</i>
<i>Lg.</i>	<i>Leges</i>

Philo Judaeus a.k.a. Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.E.–c. 50 C.E.)	
Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>DVM</i>	<i>De Vita Mosis (Life of Moses)</i>
<i>DLG</i>	<i>De Legatione Ad Gaium (On the Embassy to Gaius)</i>

Flavius Josephus (37–c. 100 C.E.)	
Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Antiquitates Judaicae (Jewish Antiquities)</i>
<i>TF</i>	<i>Testimonium Flavianum (Jewish Antiquities, 18, 3, 3 / 63–64)</i>
<i>JP</i>	<i>James (The Just) Passage (Jewish Antiquities, 20, 9, 1 / 197–203)</i>
<i>BP</i>	<i>(John the) Baptist Passage (Jewish Antiquities, 18, 5, 2 / 116–119)</i>
<i>War</i>	<i>Bellum Judaicum (Judean War)</i>
<i>C.Ap.</i>	<i>Contra Apionem (Against Apion)</i>
<i>Vit.</i>	<i>Vita Iosephi (Life of Josephus)</i>

¹ Cf. Liddell and Scott. 1996. *Greek-English Lexicon*.

Publius or Gaius Cornelius Tacitus (c. 55–117 C.E.)	
Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>An.</i>	<i>Annales</i>

Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus a.k.a. Pliny the Younger (c. 62–113 C.E.)	
Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae (Letters)</i>
<i>HN</i>	<i>Historia Naturalis (Natural History)</i>

Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (c. 69–140 C.E.)	
Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>DVC</i>	<i>De Vita Caesarum (Lives of the Caesars)</i>

Iustinus Philosophus a.k.a. Justin Martyr (c. 100–163/167 C.E.)	
Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>TID</i>	<i>Tryphone Iudeo Dialogus</i>

Hegesippus (c. 110–180 C.E.)²	
Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>Hypo.</i>	<i>Hypomnemata</i>

Lucianus Samosatensis a.k.a. Lucian of Samosata (c. 125–after 180 C.E.)	
Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>DMP</i>	<i>De Morte Peregrini (Death of Peregrinus)</i>

Titus Flavius Clemens a.k.a. Clement (c. 150–c. 215 C.E.)	
Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>Strom.</i>	<i>Stromata (Patchwork)</i>

² There is some evidence that Hegesippus is not the actual name of the author of the now lost *Hypomnemata*. According to Kirby (2013), he may be associated with Josephus in Alexandria and then corrupted to the name of Hegesippus in Caesarea. Regardless, his writings are only known to us through, inter alia, *Eusebius Pamphili*. Cf. Kirby. 2013. *Chasing Hegesippus* [Online]. Available: <http://peterkirby.com/chasing-hegesippus.html> [28 July 2014].

Claudius or Lucius Cassius Dio Cocceianus a.k.a. Dio (155–235 C.E.)

Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>HR</i>	<i>Historia Romana</i>

Irenaeus (fl. 180–c. 202 C.E.)

Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>Haer.</i>	<i>Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies)</i>

Celsus the Platonist (Second century C.E.)

Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>TW</i>	<i>True Word</i>

Tertullianus, Quintus Septimius Florens (c. 160–c. 225 C.E.)

Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apologeticus (Tertullian's Defence of the Christians Against the Heathen)</i>
<i>DPH</i>	<i>De Praescriptione Haereticorum (Prescription against Heretics)</i>

Origenes Adamantius a.k.a. Origen (184/185–253/254 C.E.)

Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>Cels.</i>	<i>Contra Celsum (Against Celsus)</i>
<i>COM</i>	Commentary on Matthew

Gaius Valerius Galerius Maximinus Daia Augustus (270–313 C.E.)

Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>Mem.</i>	<i>Memoranda</i>

Eusebius Pamphili a.k.a. Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 263–c. 339 C.E.)

Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>Hier.</i>	<i>Adversus Hieroclem (Against Hierocles)</i>
<i>Dem. ev.</i>	<i>Demonstratio evangelica (Demonstration of the Gospel)</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica (Ecclesiastical History)</i>
<i>Praep. ev.</i>	<i>Praeparatio evangelica (Preparation for the Gospel)</i>
<i>Theoph.</i>	<i>Theophania (Divine Manifestation)</i>

Scriptores Historiae Augustae (284–337 C.E.)

Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>Hist. Aug.</i>	<i>Historia Augusta (Augustan History)</i>

Sossianus Hierocles (fl. 303 C.E.).

Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>Phil.</i>	<i>Philaletes (Lover of Truth).</i>

Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus a.k.a. Jerome (c. 347–420 C.E.)

Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>DCP</i>	<i>Dialogus Contra Pelagianos (Against Pelagius)</i>
<i>DVI</i>	<i>De Viris Illustribus (On Illustrious Men)</i>
<i>Jer.Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae (Various letters from Jer.Ep. I to Jer.Ep. CL.)</i>

Paulus Orosius (Fifth Century C.E.)

Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>HAP</i>	<i>Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII (Seven Books of History Against the Pagans)</i>

Georgius Syncellus (fl. Eighth Century—died after 810 C.E.)

Abbreviation	Title of Work
<i>Sync. Chron.</i>	<i>Ecloga Chronographica</i>

Biblical/Scriptural Works	
Abbreviation	Title of Work
LXX	<i>Vetus Testamentum Graece Redditum</i>
MT	Masoretic Text (Hebrew Bible)
Isa	Isaiah
1 Kgs	1 Kings
Mal	Malachi
<i>NT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
John	Gospel according to John
Luke	Gospel according to Luke
Mark	Gospel according to Mark
Matt	Gospel according to Matthew
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
1 Cor	1 st Epistle to the Corinthians
Gal	Epistle to the Galatians
Jas	Epistle of James
Phlm	Epistle to Philemon
<i>Gos. Thom.</i>	<i>Gospel of Thomas</i>
<i>JSB</i>	<i>The Jewish Study Bible</i> . 2004. Edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, New York: Oxford University Press.
<i>EJ</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i> . 1982. Edited by Fern Seckbach. 17 Volumes. Jerusalem: Keterpress.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Christian Dependence on Josephus

It is often argued (cf. Meier, 1991: 68; C.E. Price, 2008: 21; and Doherty, 2009: 533), that the most important, independent, extra-biblical/scriptural references to a possible flesh-and-blood Jesus and certain of his avowed contemporaries (i.e. James the Just and John the Baptist), are to be found, inter alia, in the writings of *Yosef ben Matityahu* a.k.a. *Josephus Flavius*, better known as Josephus.³ Specifically, within his *Ant. (Antiquitates Judaicae)*, ostensibly written in c. 94 C.E., are to be found three disputed passages, viz.:

1. *Ant.* 18, 3, 3 / 63–64 (better known as the *TF* [*Testimonium Flavianum*]);
2. *Ant.* 18, 5, 2 / 116–119 (which this book will refer to as the *BP* [*John the Baptist Passage*]); and
3. *Ant.* 20, 9, 1 / 197–203 (which this book will refer to as the *JP* [*James the Just Passage*]).

Only a few, mostly non-Christian, and very often, highly sceptical scholars have questioned the legitimacy of the *TF* (*Testimonium Flavianum*), *BP* (*John the Baptist Passage*) and *JP* (*James the Just Passage*) respectively.

³ Although *Publius* (or *Gaius*) *Cornelius Tacitus* possibly referred to Christians living at the time of *Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus* in his *Annales* (c. 116 C.E.), i.e. *An.* XV, 44, he is at best repeating hearsay. This cannot be employed as convincing evidence for an extra-biblical reference to an historical Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, realistically speaking, the account, if genuine, only refers to followers or adherents of the then new religion known today as Christianity. In this regard, no-one seriously doubts that the religious cult(s) eventually known as Christianity existed by the second century C.E. This and similar issues are dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Two.

However, by and large, contemporary, predominantly Christocentric, scholarship (cf. Charlesworth, 1988: 93–4; Meier, 1991: 63; Fredriksen, 2000: 249; and C.E. Price, 2008: 22), claim that these passages have at least some degree of authenticity. In this context, they tend to view these three episodes as either being *completely* genuine or at worst, original Josephan creations with a modicum of amendment or embellishment by well-meaning, pious Christian scribes sometime in the first four centuries of the Common Era.⁴

Furthermore, based on this assumption, these often more conservative scholars are seemingly content to accept that these three passages provide historicity of Jesus researchers with a *dependable* nucleus of historical material. In short, the information that they contain corroborates their shared worldview regarding an historical Jesus, James the Just or John the Baptist.

This knowledge also satisfies the principal tenets of their religious belief. In sharp contradistinction, many of the more rational arguments in support of total interpolation (i.e. complete premeditated and dishonest forgery)—because they are often deemed to be anti-Christian in nature—are generally rejected by scholars of the Christian faith. Here, the tendency seems to be an almost automatic dismissal, without having undertaken an adequate analysis of the full significance of a particular thesis. In short, all too often, their seemingly perfunctory rebuttal gives the distinct impression that their conclusions are based on unwavering devotion rather than on any degree of rigorous understanding of the issue(s) under discussion.

Lastly, the tendency to defer to the majority view, whether it is sceptical or more conservative,⁵ is also often seen to be justification for accepting a particular (possibly more popular), outlook rather than the specific probity and merit of an exacting argument. This accusation may (at times) be laid at the feet of both conservative and sceptical scholars.

According to the renowned Josephus scholar Feldman (in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1992: 990–991) the authenticity of the *TF* passage has been almost unanimously accepted by scholars. Feldman also confirms that from

⁴ Here I refer to “Pious Fraud”. Specifically, this refers to, inter alia, the fraudulent manufacture of a supposedly historically valid text purely for the purposes of proselytisation and/or the writing of an apologetic by any member of the early Christian Church (c. 50–900 C.E.).

⁵ More sceptical scholars regularly accuse the more conservative researchers like Kirby of being victims of a so-called “bandwagon” effect. Cf. Doherty, 2008: 49 and Doherty, 2009: 534.

the latter half of the twentieth century onwards, the vast majority of conservative, Christian scholars have never doubted the partial authenticity of these three passages—especially the *TF*. Indeed, between 1937 and 1980, of the 52 scholars who reviewed this topic, 39 believed that *portions* of the *TF* were authentic.

This is supported by Kirby (2014a) whose own review of the literature (in a scholarly online article which discusses the *TF* in depth), reveals that the trend in modern scholarship has moved even more dramatically towards *partial* authenticity. Indeed, Kirby supports the fact that of thirteen books written since 1980, ten of them argue that the *TF* to be partly genuine. Only the remaining three (secular authors) deny the authenticity of the *TF*.

Thus, considerable (albeit debateable) literary support exists which exhorts the reader to accept the authenticity of the three passages under review. However, it often fails to deal directly and/or objectively with certain refutations proffered by mostly non-Christian and/or more positivistic scholars. It would seem, therefore, that elements of personal bias (whether justified or not), and the specific constructed worldviews of the scholars concerned are a major contributor to the outcome of debate. It is fair to state that personal faith remains a major incentive behind most of these researchers' respective approaches to the issues of authenticity, partial authenticity or total forgery in *Ant*. Up until now, apart from the distinctly sceptical stance of scholars like Doherty⁶, Olson⁷, Wells⁸ and Zindler⁹ etc. this glaring oversight has not been analytically and impassively tackled head on.

Much has been proffered to date, to supposedly prove total and/or partial forgery but certain nagging aspects still leave room for understandable doubt. To be balanced, the dearth of convincing evidence which supports authenticity (to whatever degree) needs to be unpacked, amplified and wherever possible substantiated and/or refuted in the context of corroborated historical precedence. This includes, Josephus' known political and religious stances and literary style as well as recent, as yet unconsidered, but critically important discoveries made in the numismatic field by Kokkinos (2010: 363–400).

⁶ Cf. Doherty, 2009.

⁷ Cf. Olson, 1999: 305–322.

⁸ Cf. Wells, 1999.

⁹ Cf. Zindler, 2003.

Thus, after several centuries of seemingly pointless debate, including the huge scholarly polemic which raged for nearly two centuries in Europe between c. 1600 and the late nineteenth century (cf. Bilde, 1988: 125), this book promises to proffer a conscious, albeit carefully constructed, effort to neutralise the derogatory effects of mechanical conformity to established and/or popular worldviews. In this context, this book offers a highly critical review of *all* arguments both positive and negative that claim to accurately position these three disputed passages.

Based on the available literature, it would seem that (more normally), the typical liberal and sceptical scholars will initiate matters by attempting to refute one or more of the passages under review and then, purely as a reaction, the more conservative ones will attempt to counter the claim. Again, because the more conservative scholars also have a vested interest in not having doubt cast on the historical existence of Jesus, they typically require the burden of proof to be placed on the side of the more sceptical scholars. The counterclaim is that the burden of proof is in fact being placed on the wrong side.¹⁰

Contemporary debate tends to follow this pattern and the following selected examples of argumentation as supplied by, inter alia, Barnett, Doherty, Dunn, Ehrman, Carrier, Charlesworth, Feldman, Fredriksen, Habermas, Hata, Holding, Kirby, Leidner, Mason, Meier, Olson, C.E. Price, R.M. Price, Vermes, Wells, Zeitlin and Zindler etc. serve merely to highlight the types of rationale and logic employed by scholars engaged in this apparently endless dispute.

¹⁰ Zindler explains his position in a far more amusing manner:

[I]t must be realized that the burden of proof does not rest upon the skeptic in this matter. As always is the case, the burden of proof weighs upon those who assert that some thing or some process exists. If someone claims that he never has to shave because every morning before he can get to the bathroom he is assaulted by a six-foot rabbit with extremely sharp teeth who trims his whiskers better than a razor—if someone makes such a claim, no skeptic need worry about constructing a disproof. Unless evidence for the claim is produced, the skeptic can treat the claim as false. This is nothing more than sane, every-day practice.

Cf. Zindler, 1998: 2.

This book sets out to try and resolve this dispute. In this regard, it attempts to answer a number of questions that have bothered scholars for literally centuries.

Primarily, we need to objectively know to what degree the three passages of Christian import which appear in Josephus' *Ant.* may be deemed to be authentic and/or historically reliable. In this regard, this book reveals the following:

1. The indebtedness of contemporary, leading biblical scholars (especially within the context of the interpolation debate), to their preferred worldview when it comes to engaging in supposedly impartial, constructive and meaningful academic discourse.
2. Proof that Josephus (based on an in-depth analysis of his own worldview and historical context), could never have known and/or written about Jesus, John the Baptist or James the Just.
3. Hard evidence that specifically ante-Nicean Christian writers in general and independently needed to invent extra-biblical references to Jesus, John the Baptist and James the Just.
4. Lastly, rational evidence that points to the very identity of the interpolators concerned.

1.2 Some Notes Concerning the Employment of Terminology

Although this book has been designed primarily for the informed lay person and more seasoned Josephus scholar alike, it is imperative that before embarking on this journey of discovery that we are all on the same page, so-to-speak.

Thus, for the sake of greater clarity, certain terms that I will be employing need to be elucidated as regards their import and interpretation within a stated context. In most cases these are employed in a more regular way and do not necessarily deviate substantially from more common use. However, in certain situations a specific term may well include more nuanced significance.

Conservative scholars

It is certainly not my intention to lump together all Christian-based scholars into one clique identified by a singular and monolithic point of view. Rather, because, one of the central issues under critical review, is the influence of a scholar's worldview on the outcome of supposed objective reasoning it is sometimes necessary to use a collective adjective when referring to those

scholars who tend to walk a tightrope between faithful adherence to their personal religious convictions and intimate experiences and their academic training as supposedly dispassionate investigators.

Thus, the objective of the term “conservative scholar” is to highlight that the individual’s constructed worldview not only overtly colours his/her perceptions but in fact has a deciding vote when determining the very outcome of a particular argument. Wells (1988b: 20–21) has perhaps a more negative understanding of this term:

Conservative apologists still do the same . . . There is more parade of erudition and open-mindedness. But the conclusions always turn out to be in accordance with desire, in harmony with what is regarded as essential doctrine.

Thus for the purposes of this book, scholars, who as Wells intimates, tend to wear their religious convictions on their sleeve, are grouped together as “conservative”. In this context, most conservative researchers would also subscribe to a confession of faith whereas a liberal, secular scholar would most definitely not. Although aspects of fundamentalism are certainly factors here, many, if not all, of the leading Christian-based scholars who will feature in this book still claim to be open-minded and purportedly champion rational thought.

Liberal scholars

Scholars, who are included for convenience under this epitaph, even if adhering to a particular worldview, are normally prepared to alter or modify their religious views or historical understanding when presented with hard evidence. Here, they are not subservient to confessions of faith. Many “liberal” scholars have what could be termed a “provisional” state of understanding. In other words, they are prepared to react immediately to the logic of an argument and are poised to change their opinion if the argument appears sound. Simultaneously, such individuals are more likely to fully comprehend and appreciate what they have just learned but with the proviso that it may well be subject to future emendation. Ideally, they have little or no personal baggage to slow them down.

Sceptical scholars

I will employ this term for those scholars who are overtly anti-fundamentalist, anti-organised religion (sometimes even atheistic in outlook). Their

constructed world-view, equally favours their approach although, by default, due to the fact that they have no personal attachment to the topic of their discussion they are more likely to be supremely critical and immediately accepting of any outcome that is backed by hard evidence. Many of these researchers seem to accept the import of embracing a provisional state of understanding and vehemently eschew any form of unsubstantiated dogma.

Extra-biblical/scriptural sources

This term will refer to any secular primary source written between c. 1–300 C.E. which refers in any way to Jesus and/or his claimed associates. Excluded here are the books of the New Testament, proto-gnostic or gnostic gospels, Jewish-Christian gospels, infancy gospels, fragmentary or partially preserved non-canonical gospels including reconstructed gospels. For the sake of convenience this term may also include the *Talmud Bavli*, *Talmud Yerushalmi*, *Tosefta* and any other relevant rabbinical material.

Interpolation

In normal parlance, this term refers to the modification or distortion of a text by the introduction of additional or extraneous material. These often scribal intercalations are recognised as textual inaccuracies which can occur during the routine process of copying a manuscript by hand. It is generally accepted that the older a manuscript (and which normally existed before the advent of modern reproduction technologies), the more likely it is that textual discrepancies might occur inadvertently.

The cause of these intercalations is well known. For example, copyists, on noticing what they believed to be an error or omission from a previous period, often wrote amendments and/or missing text in the margins. As marginal inscriptions occur in almost all handwritten manuscripts, it was on occasion difficult for a subsequent copyist to ascertain with clarity which marginal inscription was a record of, inter alia, a prior omission, a note of clarity or even a personal comment left behind by a previous reader.

Their personal constructed worldviews apart, more punctilious scribes might well transcribe everything that was observed in the margins of a manuscript and interpolate this into the main text of the new copy. These types of interpolation are well recognised but, in this book, the term will primarily apply to pre-meditated fraud. In this regard, innocent scribal errors (other than those caused by unconsciously/subconsciously projecting one's

personal world-view), will be referred to as such.

Thus, interpolation (apart from where the term is employed in a specific way by other authors), will refer to the deliberate addition of textual material by a scribe. Here interpolation includes the act of not only inserting new text, but also removing existing text, and/or amending surviving text deliberately to provide the unsuspecting reader with a new meaning and interpretation other than that which was intended by the original author.

For these reasons, the term “interpolation” is employed in this book as a generic label to indicate fraudulent and deliberate intercalation and redaction of an existing text, regardless of whether the scribe believed he was being directed by higher forces or not. Where the amendment was made by sincere oversight on the part of a particular scribe, this will be emphasised by the context of the discussion.

Jesus

Obviously, numerous individuals who lived in, inter alia, Galilee, Judea and Samaria (i.e. modern Israel) in the Tannaitic period¹¹, were at times known by the translated name of “Jesus”. Therefore, unless indicated otherwise, in this book, the term “Jesus” refers specifically to the possible historical individual also known as Jesus the Nazarene or Jesus of Nazareth. It should also be pointed out that the employment of the accolade “of Nazareth” in no way implies that this title is accurate or that any agreement exists as to the correct etymology of this now popular and often misused term. We should also be mindful of not conflating a possible historical Jesus with the mythologised and/or supernatural Christ invented in the early centuries of the Common Era.

Worldview

I favour the insights of, inter alia, Koltko-Rivera (2000: 2). Thus a “worldview” should be seen as a way of “describing the universe and life within it, both in terms of what is and what ought to be.” It would also be fair to state that a worldview is intimately linked to an individual’s ideology.

¹¹ Also known as the Mishnaic period (i.e. c. 10–c. 220 C.E.).

1.3 My Preferred Approach

Interpretivist/constructivist episteme

I will take a more interpretivist/constructivist approach rather than a naïve positivistic one. According to Cohen and Manion (1994: 36), an interpretivist/constructivist approach to research has the intention of understanding the world of human experience better because it accepts that reality is as Mertens (2005: 12) confirms: “socially constructed”. Here it is assumed that the constructed worldviews of all role-players reviewed in this book (including that of the researcher), will impact on the research findings.

This approach also allows me to make use of, where relevant and applicable, a wider range of methods which, when triangulated, may better assist in establishing greater validity of interpretation. With reference to Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) I need to be empowered, *inter alia*, to rely on both qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed methods). Here, quantitative data will be utilised in a manner which either bolsters or expands upon qualitative data and hopefully “effectively deepens the description”.

It is also my personal contention that the greatest stumbling block to contemporary Josephus scholars reaching consensus on the interpolation debate is almost totally a result of the dominant worldviews of the researchers involved. An interpretivist/constructivist approach, fully focussed on this issue of social constructs, better assists in highlighting this problem and makes it possible to establish a more plausible context and, as far as is possible, shared worldview, within which rational deduction may take place.

In short, we need to acknowledge that we all carry a lot of baggage with us. If we are going to be objective in our discussions, we need to leave that baggage at the door before entering the room of rational debate. Or if that is not possible, perhaps because of one’s deep commitment to an unyielding, irrational belief structure, then at the very least be honest enough to acknowledge that you are a biased person before attempting to claim that you are being in any way “objective”. In a real sense, we need to lay down some ground rules here before we travel together on our journey of discovery.

It is acknowledged that all deliberation will be taking place within a linguistic paradigm that posits that knowledge is mediated solely through language (thinking) and consequently it is not possible to ever objectively know

what we assume to be reality. Therefore, an interpretivist/constructivist epistemology is clearly favoured.

It is accepted that it will never be possible to accurately reconstruct the historical context(s) that underpin(s) the premises of the various arguments tendered by the key-role players in the contemporary interpolation debate. It is also accepted that a particular scholar's constructed reality will impinge on his/her interpretation of the best-argued evidence. It can be safely argued that knowledge is that which is constructed by the researcher or theorist by virtue of any number of applicable methods.

Although it is certainly not refuted that information can be obtained by direct sense experience of the world (linguistic mediation), the important point is that we can never really know the source of that perception (the assumed external reality). Rather we constantly formulate (construct) an understanding of the world within which we live by thinking—a process which is always mediated linguistically. In this latter regard, certain of the views of the post-structuralist philosopher Derrida¹² are invaluable in grasping the point that language (in all its manifestations), cannot embody inviolable universal truth and is itself a flawed medium.

Unfortunately, language as “text”, regardless of its form (i.e. oral, scribal, aural, olfactory etc.), is the only medium we have—which points to meaning always being imperfectly mediated.

Again, because all interpretation can only take place within a particular “text” (i.e. context), it is never possible to return to the “source” or the “origin” deferred/referred to by the “text”. In the same way the intentions of an author or an artist are, in the final analysis, quite irrelevant when interpreting say, a particular written text or work of art, since the reader or spectator, armed with their own constructed realities, only has the written or visual text by which to arrive at a particular (albeit shifting/provisional) point of view.

This approach neither accepts the maladroit conclusion that in the final analysis “anything goes” nor does it advocate nihilism. Undeniably, the complete opposite is implied. Any judicious deconstruction of a text implies a rigorous and critical analysis with an amplified awareness of the pitfalls of naïve relativism.

Lastly, I am indebted to the contributions made by numerous scholars.

¹² Cf. Derrida, 1997.

On many occasions I need to contradict what a particular scholar has claimed. When this occurs, this is not to be seen as a personal attack against the individual but, rather, the substance of the argument itself. In this context, if anyone makes a valid argument irrespective of their worldview it is treated as having merit and vice versa.

CHAPTER TWO

SUPPOSED EXTRA-BIBLICAL/SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES TO JESUS OF NAZARETH AND ASSOCIATES

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to confirm that apart from Josephus' *Ant.* (which we still need to examine in greater detail), no other genuine historical sources exist to provide valid extra-biblical/scriptural evidence relevant to the historical existence of Jesus.

Obviously, we do have references to individuals such as Jesus of Nazareth, James the Just and John the Baptist in the New Testament. Furthermore, in the case of John the Baptist we could also point to the scriptures of the Mandaeans. However apart from these two sets of scripture, nothing else of value actually exists. Many Christian scholars will roundly disagree with me on this point. However, this chapter should prove my point beyond a shadow of a doubt.

In this regard, purely for the purposes of supplying some important context to the debate, I have taken the liberty of listing below, typically conservative beliefs about the validity of certain extra biblical sources. In this example, I have chosen Habermas (1996a, b and c) as an excellent representative of this approach, because he has conveniently dealt with many of these issues at length in his book *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (1996a). I must also make it clear that I do not mean to attack this scholar personally. I am only interested in him as a source for typical faith-based deductions.

Thus, reproduced below in précis form, I have presented some key aspects of Habermas' stance on a wide range of issues directly related to claimed extra-biblical sources, including Josephus' *TF* which will be dealt with in far more detail in Chapter Three. In this context, it is informative to witness how his total commitment to his religious belief makes it possible for

Habermas to seemingly view all alleged extra-biblical sources as having total validity. In this regard, he makes a wide range of assertions, fuelled largely by wishful thinking based on a specific reading of the predicated sources. In this context, Habermas, speciously states that “these beliefs on the part of certain persons are a matter of historical record”. Unfortunately, this is not true. I list some of Habermas’ claims (1996a: 187–242) below:

1. According to Josephus and *Mara ben Serapion*, Jesus was really a “wise, virtuous and ethical man”;
2. Based on the *TF* and certain passages in the *Talmud*, Jesus “had many disciples, from both the Jews and the Gentiles”;
3. Based on Pliny and Tacitus, Jesus was worshipped as a deity and further, because of the *TF* we know that Jesus was also believed by some to be the Messiah;
4. Because of *Mara ben Serapion* we know that Jesus was called “King”;
5. Due to Lucian, *Mara ben Serapion* and the Gospel of Thomas we know that there was a “tendency” among some ancient writers to “view Jesus as a philosopher with some distinctive teachings”;
6. The *Talmud Sanhedrin* 43a refers specifically to Jesus;
7. Both Tacitus and Josephus confirm Jesus’ death at the hands of Pontius Pilate;
8. Phlegon, the *Talmud*, Josephus and the *Acts of Pilate* supply specific details of Jesus’ crucifixion, including his nailing to the cross, the gambling for his garments and the three-hour darkness;
9. *Mara Bar Serapion’s* letter is evidence that Jesus was “executed unjustly and that the Jews were judged accordingly by God”;
10. Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny and *Mara Bar Serapion* supply evidence of the resurrection of Jesus. We know this because the latter writer stated ‘Jesus’ teachings lived on in his disciples;

11. Phlegon's references support the notion of Jesus appearing after his death and displaying his *stigmata*;
12. The contents of the *Toldoth Yeshu* are factual;
13. Pliny's comments about Christians worshipping before dawn may be a reference to Sunday;
14. Pliny confirms that Christians worshipped Jesus as a deity;
15. Thallus' comments are evidence that early sceptics were seeking logical explanations to explain away assertions of Christ's divinity as soon as twenty years after his death; and
16. According to Tacitus, Christians were present at the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E.

It is in this context of inaccurate and/or misleading deductions, that this chapter reviews all claimed extra-biblical/scriptural works that are often held up by the more credulous as *bona fide*, extra biblical, historical evidence for the existence of Jesus and/or his ministry.

This chapter also serves to validate the most plausible historical context for the suspected interpolations in *Ant.* For example, due to the lack of suitable sources, early Christian apologists were often forced to manufacture them. Certainly, if valid proof had been freely available to Christian writers at the time (i.e. before c. 400 C.E.) there would not have been any need for pious fraud!

This review is also necessary because, although most sceptical scholars¹³ refute all of the sources discussed in this chapter, many fundamentalist Christian scholars will claim the complete opposite. For many Christians, these texts are indisputable valid historical sources for Jesus and further, are considered so trustworthy that those who would even dare to question them will find it difficult to do so. In this context (Cf. Holding, 2008: 19) J.

¹³ For example, the well-known sceptic, Wells, commenting on the reasons for the lack of extra-biblical references to Jesus of Nazareth, states: "[T]here is no reason why the pagan writers of this period should have thought Christianity any more important than other enthusiastic religions of the Empire. Dio Cassius, who wrote ... as late as about AD 229, makes no mention at all of Christians or Christianity, and alludes but once to its great rival, Mithraism." Cf. Wells, 1975: 15).