

The Coincidences of the Emmaus Narrative of Luke and the Testimonium of Josephus

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Published in
The Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha 13 (1995) pp. 59-77

1 Introduction

The only first-century description of the life of Jesus of Nazareth outside of Christian literature is the concise, but controversial, account found in the Jewish Antiquities of Josephus. Although potentially of great importance, this account appears to resemble Christian beliefs too closely to be the authentic work of a Jewish writer. Its true status has therefore long been the subject of debate.

What has previously gone unnoticed in the literature is that when this passage from the Antiquities is read side by side with a certain excerpt from the Gospel of Luke – specifically, a portion of the Emmaus narrative – a number of surprising coincidences become manifest. In this article, I shall point out these coincidences and weigh their significance. I shall discuss three possible ways to account for them: (1) they are the result of chance; or (2) the “Josephus” passage is actually a later Christian interpolation influenced by Luke; or (3), the most interesting possibility, Josephus and Luke both based their descriptions on statements circulated by Jewish Christians during the years 80-90 C.E.

2 The Testimonium of Josephus

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.

This passage, from the Jewish Antiquities, 18.3.3 §63,¹ is the only account of

¹Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* (trans. Louis H. Feldman; The Loeb Classical Library;

Jesus to be attributed to a Jewish writer of the first century. It has been studied and quoted since the fourth century, in the process garnering the name of the “Testimonium Flavianum.” If authentic, the date of its composition would be clear enough. By Josephus’ account, the Antiquities was completed in the thirteenth year of the Emperor Domitian, 93 or 94 C.E. (exactly 1900 years ago). Since there is no similar account of Jesus in Josephus’ earlier work *The Jewish War*, published between 70 and 79 C.E., while other material concerning Pilate does appear in both works, the Testimonium was most probably composed between these two publication dates, i.e., in the period from 80 to 94 C.E. We know nothing more about the composition or source of this passage. Josephus elsewhere shows no influence by Christian theology, the Gospels, or creedal literature, but there are two other sections that bear directly on Christian history: Ant 18.5.2 §116-119 discusses John the Baptist, and Ant. 20.9.1 §200-203 deals with the accusation and (apparently) death of James, the brother of Jesus, circa 62 C.E. In the latter passage, Jesus is again mentioned, and since there he is referred to only as the one “called the Messiah,” its authenticity has not been seriously doubted.²

The question of whether the Testimonium was indeed written by Josephus, or whether it might not have been a much later invention by a Christian scribe, has been extensively debated since at least the seventeenth century. Because of its overall resemblance to Christian teachings and its sometimes blunt affirmations, it is thought highly unlikely to have been written by Josephus as it now stands. But the style has been shown to be principally consistent with that of Josephus, and the second Antiquities passage referring to Jesus, widely accepted as authentic, seems to presuppose some prior discussion. More generally, the content is consistent with a very primitive form of Christianity, consistent with the first century but peculiarly modest if ascribed to a highly motivated forger of a later century. Excellent recent reviews of the arguments can be found in Feldman³ and, with an especially extensive review of the literature, in Meier.⁴

At the present moment, the scholarly consensus tends to accept that the Testimonium is from the hand of Josephus, but has been somewhat altered by later Christian editors. The alteration, at minimum, would have included the addition of two phrases: (1), “if one can call him a man”, and (2), “He was the Messiah.” Some commentators also dismiss the entire sentence describing the appearance to the disciples and the predictions of the prophets. The passage as a whole shows many examples of vocabulary and style that are typical of Josephus,

Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1965), 18.3.3 §63-64.

²For this and other areas of Josephus research, see the extensive bibliography by Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship*, (New York: de Gruyter, 1984).

³L. H. Feldman, “Josephus”, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1991); also, “A Selective Critical Bibliography of Josephus,” in Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata, eds., *Josephus, the Bible, and History* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1988), pp. 430-435; and Ref. 1.

⁴John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 56-88. (A version appears in CBQ 52 (1990), pp. 76-103.)

as has been discussed by Thackeray,⁵ Martin,⁶ Winter,⁷ and, with the help of the concordance of Rengstorf,⁸ by Birdsall⁹ and, most recently, by Meier.¹⁰ Of these, only Birdsall supports an entirely forged passage. Scholars who in recent works have looked favorably on the essential authenticity of the Testimonium include John Dominic Crossan, Raymond Brown, and James Charlesworth.

The Testimonium, authentic or not, is written in the style of Josephus, and so part of this article will concentrate attention on certain deviations from that style: deviations that are not readily explained by wholly Josephan authorship, nor by recourse to a later editor. Some of these deviations, I will argue, coincide with similar oddities in the Emmaus narrative of Luke. The authenticity question will be taken up again in the latter part of this article.

3 The Emmaus Narrative

They replied, “The things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, who was a man, a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people; and how the chief priests and leaders of us delivered him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we had hoped he would be the one to liberate Israel. Yes, and besides all these things, is passing this third day today since these things occurred. [...]” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things in all the scriptures about himself.

This excerpt is part of the Emmaus narrative of Luke, verses 24:19-21 and 24:25-27. It presents the ironic scene in which Cleopas and his companion, while traveling to Emmaus as the Passover enters its third day, relate the events concerning Jesus for a passing stranger whom they do not recognize to be Jesus himself. The reader should note that, in the quoted text, I have chosen not to include in the Jesus description the verses 24:22-24, a narrative flashback which recapitulates the discovery of the empty tomb by the women.

The date of this passage’s composition is not as certain as that of the Testimonium. Scholars of the passage see evidence of an earlier tradition – the name Cleopas, the non-Lukan vocabulary – that has been incorporated by Luke; sum-

⁵H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus: The Man and the Historian* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion/Ktav, 1929).

⁶Ch. Martin, “Le Testimonium Flavianum. Vers une solution définitive?” *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 20 (1941), pp. 409-46.

⁷Paul Winter, “Josephus on Jesus and James,” in E. Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. and ed. by G. Vermes and F. Millar (Edinburgh: Clark, 1973), pp. 428-441.

⁸Karl H. Rengstorf, *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus* (4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1973-1983).

⁹J. Neville Birdsall, “The Continuing Enigma of Josephus’ Testimony about Jesus,” *BJRL* 67 (1984-84), pp. 609-622.

¹⁰Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, pp. 80-84.

mary of these arguments is given by Fitzmyer.¹¹ But this does not help much in dating. Luke's gospel is usually thought to have been written in the period of, approximately, 80 to 95 C.E., which would correspond to the composition of Josephus' *Antiquities*; but there are speculations that fall far outside this range.

The Emmaus passage is something of a mystery because, among other reasons, it has no parallel in the other gospels, except for a fragment at Mark 16:12-13 (the longer ending of Mark), and one speaker is named, Cleopas, who is mentioned nowhere else in the Gospels. There has historically been a temptation to identify him with Clopas, a relative of Mary, who appears in John 19:25. Fitzmyer, however, stresses they are not the same name (Cleopas is the shortened masculine form of Cleopatra, while Clopas is of Semitic origin). But the identification might still be made, and if it were, one can then rely on the "firm Church tradition" related by Eusebius, that Clopas was the father of Simon, who became Bishop of Jerusalem upon the death of James. This would connect the Emmaus passage to the Jerusalem church.

4 A Synopsis of the Testimonium and the Emmaus Narrative

The Testimonium of Josephus
(*Jewish Antiquities* 18.3.3 §63-64)

The Emmaus Narrative
(Luke 24:18-27)

Γίνεται δὲ κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον

τὰ γενόμενα ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις· καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Ποῖα οἱ δὲ εἶπον αὐτῷ. Τὰ περὶ

Ἰησοῦς σοφὸς ἀνὴρ,

Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζαρηνοῦ, ὃς ἐγένετο ἀνὴρ προφήτης

εἶγε ἄνδρα αὐτὸν λέγειν χρή.

ἦν γὰρ παραδόξων ἔργων ποιητής,

δυνατὸς ἐν ἔργῳ

διδάσκαλος ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἡδονῆ
τάληθῆ δεχομένων,

καὶ λόγῳ ἐναντίον τοῦ Θεοῦ

καὶ πολλοὺς μὲν Ἰουδαίους, πολλοὺς δὲ
καὶ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἐπηγάγετο.

καὶ παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ,

ὁ χριστὸς οὗτος ἦν.

¹¹Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel of Luke, X-XXIV* (Anchor Bible 28a; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), p. 1555.

καὶ αὐτὸν ἐνδείξει	ὅπως τε παρέδωκαν αὐτὸν
τῶν πρώτων ἀνδρῶν παρ' ἡμῖν	οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες ἡμῶν
σταυρωθῆ ἐπιτετιμηχότος Πιλάτου	εἰς κρίμα θανάτου καὶ ἐσταύρωσαν αὐτόν.
οὐκ ἐπαύσαντο οἱ τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαπήσαντες.	ἡμεῖς δὲ ἠλπίζομεν ὅτι αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ μέλλων λυτροῦσθαι τὸν Ἰσραήλ. ἀλλὰ γε καὶ σὺν πᾶσιν τούτοις
ἐφάνη γὰρ αὐτοῖς	
τρίτην ἔχων ἡμέραν	τρίτην ταύτην ἡμέραν ἄγει
	ἀφ' οὗ ταῦτα ἐγένετο. ἀλλὰ καὶ γυναῖκες τινες ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξέστησαν ἡμᾶς, γενόμεναι ὀρθριναὶ ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ μὴ εὐροῦσαι τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ἦλθον λέγουσαι καὶ ὀπτασίαν ἀγγέλων ἑωρακέναι, οἳ λέγουσιν
πάλιν ζῶν	αὐτὸν ζῆν.
	καὶ ἀπῆλθον τινες τῶν σὺν ἡμῖν ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον, καὶ εὗρον οὕτως καθῶς καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες εἶπον, αὐτὸν δὲ οὐκ εἶδον. καὶ αὐτὸς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς, Ὡ ἀνόητοι καὶ βραδεῖς τῇ καρδίᾳ τοῦ πιστεύειν
τῶν θείων προφητῶν ταῦτά	ἐπὶ πᾶσιν οἷς ἐλάλησαν οἱ προφῆται. οὐχὶ ταῦτα ἔδει παθεῖν τὸν χριστὸν
τε καὶ ἄλλα μυρία περὶ αὐτοῦ θαυμάσια εἰρηκότων.	καὶ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ· καὶ ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν προφητῶν διερμήνευσεν αὐτοῖς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ.
εἰς ἔτι τε νῦν τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀπὸ τοῦδε ὀνομασμένον οὐκ ἐπέλιπε τὸ φύλον.	

5 Coincidences of Structure

A computer search of the New Testament on the vocabulary cluster “Jesus, man, deed” (Ἰησοῦς, ἀνὴρ, ἐργ*), which are the first three major nouns of the Testimonium, reveals that only this passage of Luke shares this cluster. Upon closer examination, one finds this to be only the first indication of a series of location correspondences, nearly synonymous phrases occurring in analogous positions in each text. One can best experience this sequence by reading the text of Luke, halting at each noun or each verb of action, and then looking to the Josephus text for a corresponding phrase at the same location.

Using this method with the Greek texts shown in Figure 1, the following phrase-by-phrase outline of coincident points is produced:

[Jesus][wise man / prophet-man][mighty/surprising][deed(s)][teacher / word][truth / (word) before God] [many people][he was indicted][by leaders][of us][sentenced to cross][those who had loved/hoped in him][spending the third day][he appeared/spoke to them][prophets][these things][and numerous other things][about him]

Each of the nineteen brackets represents a location correspondence and contains the words or summarizes the meaning at each such point. The order of the brackets strictly corresponds to the order that the phrases appear in the texts; it is only within each bracket that the order of two or more words may differ between the two texts. This strictness of order of sometimes even minor phrases forms what I call the coincidences of structure.

The outline does not indicate that there are some content differences that are not attributable to differences of style of paraphrasing. Among these are: the Testimonium mentions Pilate by name, Luke does not and ascribes the execution directly to the leaders; the Testimonium explicitly states that Jesus taught Greeks as well as Jews; the statement that Jesus was a teacher of the truth may or may not be a way of understanding “mighty in word before God;” the teaching of the two disciples by Jesus at the end of one passage does not appear in the other. Most interesting is that the two passages of the Testimonium that are often regarded as inauthentic, “if indeed one ought to call him a man” and “He was the Messiah,” do not have parallels in the Emmaus passage at analogous locations.

Similar texts used as benchmarks will aid in weighing the structural evidence. Consider this excerpt from Justin Martyr, First Apology 31, written some 50 years after the Antiquities:

In the books of the prophets we find it announced beforehand that Jesus our Christ would appear, be born through a virgin, grow up, heal every disease and sickness and raise the dead, and be despised and unrecognized and crucified and die and be raised and ascend to the heavens and be called the Son of God, and that some would be sent by him to every nation, and that the Gentiles would believe.

A phrase-by-phrase outline of this passage shows some overlap with the Testimonium: the crucifixion, the prophets (but out of order, at the beginning rather than the end), being “raised,” and perhaps, arguably, deeds and disciples. But there are many more negative correspondences, which are of two general types. (1) There are important items in the Testimonium that are not included by Justin: teaching, explicit accusation, explicit sentencing, the leaders of the community, the third day. (2) Conversely, there are important items in Justin that have no analogy in the Testimonium: virgin birth, healing of illness, lack of recognition, ascent to the heavens, called the Son of God, and sending out apostles to every nation – for Justin presents a developed Christology, while the Testimonium is instead consistent with early Jewish Christianity. These negative correspondences are typical of later creedal texts, but are not found to any serious extent in the Emmaus excerpt.

One more text I will present as a benchmark is a representative of the speeches of Acts that summarize the kerygma of the era. These speeches, through their common authorship, necessarily bear a number of resemblances to each other as well as to the excerpt from Luke; these are certainly not independent creations. Yet they still show a number of variations. The following is Acts 10:38-43:

Jesus, the one from Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with might, who went doing good and healing all those having been oppressed by the Devil, because God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they did away with by hanging on a tree. This one God raised on the third day, and gave him to become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses, those having been selected before by God, to us, who ate and drank with him after his rising from the dead. And he commanded us to proclaim to the people, and to witness that he it is who has been marked out by God as judge of the living and the dead. To this one all the prophets witness, that all shall receive forgiveness of sins through his name who believe in him.

Performing the structural outline of this passage, the following coincidences of content and order (in the Greek) are found with the Testimonium:

[Jesus][deeds/doing-good and healing][witnessed by Jews][cross/tree][third day][appeared (to witnesses)][prophets][foretold/witnessed]

Compare these eight brackets to the Luke-Testimonium outline, which has twice as many correspondences. Although there are some interesting vocabulary correspondences that may be relevant to our inquiry – “doing-good” (with its root of “deed”) and “appeared” have related words in the Testimonium – there are a number of missing elements. Conversely, this passage contains many elements that have no parallel to the Testimonium, including, among others, the repeated use of God as an active participant, eating and drinking, commands

to the disciples to preach, and forgiveness of sin. So again, the benchmark text shows fewer positive and more negative correspondences than does the Emmaus narrative.

Other brief descriptions of Jesus of similar age that are useful as benchmarks are 1 Co 15:3-8; Ignatius, To the Trallians 9; Acts 2:22-36; Acts 3:13-16; Acts 5:30-32 ; and Acts 13:23-41. These produce similar results to the two just examined: the Emmaus narrative more closely resembles the Testimonium in its phrase-by-phrase outline of content and order than any other known text of comparable age.

Since Luke probably drew the Emmaus narrative from an existing tradition, its outline suggests the possibility that Josephus, if he was indeed the author of Testimonium, drew his passage from a similar or even identical source. Consider the two possibilities for Josephus' construction of the Testimonium.

(1) Josephus created his own description of Jesus from information he had collected. The description is dominated by his selection of facts, as determined by his opinions and reactions to stories about Jesus.

(2) Josephus rigidly adhered to a pre-existing text that described Jesus, making alterations only to suit his written style. His text is dominated by a historian's motivation to faithfully record a primary source that had come to his attention.

The coincidences with the Emmaus passage tend to support the second possibility. It seems less probable that two authors working independently would coincide to this extent, in light of the benchmark texts; as the Acts speeches demonstrate, even passages by a single author can take a variety of forms.

If not due to a common source, these coincidences can have only two other explanations. Either they are due to chance; or the Testimonium is not, in fact, authentic, that it is the composition of a later Christian writer, and that this writer was in part influenced, directly or indirectly, by the excerpt from Luke.

6 Coincidences of Textual Difficulties: Introduction

Let us now turn from the question of general structure and consider specific expressions. I shall concentrate on points in both texts that have presented commentators with difficulties of interpretation or exhibit a peculiar deviation from the usual style of the author. A principal of source criticism argues that such difficulties can be clues to the tradition from which the author drew; for if the source were obscure at some point, the writer might prefer to retain the original expression rather than attempting to clarify it through a paraphrase that could turn out to be erroneous. Applying this to the present problem, we can postulate that if both the Testimonium and the Emmaus narrative employ at some point an odd or obscure form of expression then there is probable cause to believe that expression was derived from a shared or similar source.

6.1 Coincidence of the “Third Day”

An unusual phrase that has bothered Testimonium commentators and translators – it is never translated literally – is the term identifying the day on which Jesus appears to his disciples. This term is not that universally used in Christian creeds, the prepositional phrase “on the third day.” Instead, the Testimonium uses a participle form of a transitive verb taking “third day” in the accusative case as its object: τρίτην ἔχων ἡμέραν, literally, “having a third day.” In general, the use of this type of verb phrase to denote the passage of time, with either the verb ἔχειν or ἄγειν, is common enough in Greek; but as Thackeray¹² pointed out, “there is no exact parallel” to it in Josephus, and there are questions here of interpretation. First, who is the subject of the verb - - Jesus, or the disciples? It seems as though it is Jesus who is “having” this day. Second, what time passage is “a third day” counting? There is no definite article and no specification of a “first” day from which the count is begun.

Although always translated in English versions of the Testimonium as an appearance “on the third day,” the readings are more flexible than this. The literal translation is “he appeared to them having a third day alive again.” Does the author mean that while Jesus was spending his third day of life, he showed himself to his disciples? Or, rather, that the disciples were noting their third day of waiting, when Jesus appeared alive? Perhaps the author himself did not know which was meant.

The same form is used by Luke in the Emmaus narrative: τρίτην ταύτην ἡμέραν ἄγει, “spending this third day.” This is the peculiar coincidence. It is apparently the unique appearance of this form of the “third day” in Christian literature – standard lexicons such as Arndt and Gingrich provide no examples of this¹³ – and yet here it occurs in the same context and location as that of the Testimonium. Here too the phrase has no clear subject. This which has caused every translator of Luke difficulty; for example, Fitzmyer remarks that the translation of this phrase “is problematic. The verb ἄγειν in the temporal sense...usually does not occur impersonally, as it seems to do here; so some commentators have suggested that ‘Jesus’ should be understood as the subject of ἄγει: ‘(Jesus) is spending this, the third day, since this happened’...But others insist on the impersonal, intransitive sense.”¹⁴

How can this coincidence between Luke and Josephus be explained – the unique appearance of an odd phrase in each author, and probably the only two appearances in Christian literature? There are three possibilities.

(1) This usage could be only coincidence, perhaps because the phrase was not uncommon in first-century speech. But why does it show up here at Jesus’ third day, and no where else in either author? And why isn’t the subject of the phrase more easily understood in both?

¹²Thackeray, *Josephus*, p. 147.

¹³Two non-Christian uses, not referring to Jesus’ third day, are *Dialogues with the Dead* 13.3, and Achilles Tatius 7.11, cited in W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 834.

¹⁴Fitzmyer, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 1565.

(2) The Testimonium phase could be a later Christian interpolation, influenced by Luke 24. This is Meier's suggestion.¹⁵ In making his thorough analysis of the Testimonium style compared to those of the New Testament and Josephus, Meier commented on how unusual the construction was and presented Luke 24 as a partial parallel, noting that this and other "stylistic quirks" pointed to "a Christian interpolator or interpolators who naturally drew upon New Testament vocabulary as he (they) wrote about Jesus in his (their) own style." Why it would be natural to draw on a single unique usage rather than the standard form is not at all clear. The Cleopas speech in itself makes only a marginal contribution to Christology, it is not very memorable, and I don't believe it's poetry resonates in one's mind.

(3) The third possibility is that Meier is essentially correct, but has the causality reversed. The construction was originally written by a Christian, but of the first century, and it was incorporated into the Testimonium by Josephus himself. Josephus would have retained this phrase for a very good reason: he did not clearly understand what it meant, so retained the ambiguity. Similarly, Luke also may have respected his source too much to clarify it, particularly if it had been passed down from Cleopas and had the air of great authenticity. As it happens, Meier does support this general line of thought, theorizing that "since Josephus is dealing in the Testimonium with peculiar material, drawn perhaps from a special source, we need not be surprised if his usage differs slightly at a few points." But Meier does not consider authentically Josephus the entire sentence containing "the third day," on grounds of overly Christian content, a point I shall discuss in the conclusions.

Finally, it should be recalled that this coincidence is embedded in the common structural outline examined above; these are independent pieces of evidence.

6.2 Coincidence at "Our Leaders"

A rare deviation from Josephus' style is the lapse into first-person narration when discussing the accusers of Jesus: "the principal men among us." In the Antiquities, as a rule, Josephus is careful to distance himself from his subject and refer objectively to "the Jews" rather than "us." When there is an exception, there is usually an obvious explanation for it. Typically he will make a clear digression from the narrative to explain something about still-current Jewish customs, "our laws" or "our customs," to his non-Jewish readers; or he may speak of the present and use "our nation" when referring to the Jewish people after the war with Rome. But inserting himself implicitly into a historical narrative, as in the case of "the principal men among us," is extremely rare. Similar phrases, but in the third person, appear quite frequently; for example, compare Ant. 14.9.3 §165, where the accusers at the trial of Herod are "the principal ones of the Jews." Why the difference? This puzzle has been addressed by Testimonium commentators such as Thackeray and Winter, among others,

¹⁵Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, p. 83, n. 42.

without resulting in a reason for this collapse of authorial distance.

Here is the coincidence – the phrase at parallel location in the Emmaus narrative also employs the first person: “the chief priests and leaders of us.” Here the pronoun is justified because Cleopas and his companion are speaking – although they could have said “the leaders of the city,” or simply “the chief priests and leaders.” This expression does deviate from all other comparable speeches reported by Luke. In the speeches of Acts there is a concerted effort to disassociate the speaker from the leaders. In Acts 13:27, Paul, himself a dweller in Jerusalem, nonetheless asserts that “those dwelling in Jerusalem and their rulers” were the ones who asked Pilate to sentence Jesus. Note the pronouns in the speeches of Acts 2:23 (“you crucified”), 3:15 (“you delivered up”), 5:30 (“you laid hands on”), and 10:39 (“they did away with him”). Perhaps the first-person use in Luke 24 reflects or imitates an earlier, Jerusalem-centered tradition, whereas the speeches of Acts reflect the further development of the Church and the growing distance from its Jerusalem roots.

The explanations for this Luke-Testimonium coincidence are (1) chance, (2) the Testimonium phrase is a later interpolation, perhaps with polemical intent, influenced by Luke; or (3) that again, Josephus and Luke employed a similar source, and Josephus was careless in not changing the pronoun. There are, in fact, precedents for this sort of error. For example, the plea of Ezra in Ant. 11.5.3 §143 is reported as indirect speech and not as a quotation, yet refers to “our fathers;” Josephus seems to be speaking for himself. But that is certainly not Josephus’ intention; instead, he has accidentally copied over this phrase from the text on which he was drawing, namely, Ezra 9:7. The mistake is clear enough that Whiston’s translation alters it to read “their fathers.” The Testimonium usage may have been a similar error.

6.3 Coincidences of Terse Presentation

Every scholar of the Testimonium is vexed by its terseness. Josephus gives less information on the deeds and words of Jesus than he does for John the Baptist (Ant 18.5.2 §116-119), the impostor Theudas (Ant. 20.5.1 §97-99), and any number of other individuals. The same question applies if the entire passage is supposed to be the effort of a Christian forger, for would not a Christian have an interest in being clear and direct concerning the historical Jesus?

Where the Testimonium is terse, so is the Emmaus narrative, and, more significantly, at such points there are similarities of presentation and vocabulary, although a variety of other expressions could have been used. Here I will comment on three of these points.

Deeds. Commentators have wondered why Josephus did not simply say “healings,” or something similarly expressive, rather than the enigmatic “deeds” with its difficult adjective surprising (or wonderful, unusual, incredible). Luke parallels Josephus with the equally uninformative “mighty in deed.” Commentators have pointed out that “deeds” here may have a special, understood connotation of magical acts. A nearly identical phrase is used by Josephus concerning Elisha (Ant. 9.8.6 §182), albeit only after detailing several of the miracles.

There is also a passage from the Mishna that applies the term “men of deed” to people in the category of the miracle-worker Chanina ben Dosa (M. Sotah 9:15). Geza Vermes suggests the use of “deed” by both the Testimonium and Luke 24:19 may reflect this special meaning.¹⁶ The puzzle is why both Josephus and Luke used only this word, coupled with one strong adjective, to cover the acts of Jesus.

It might also be significant that the phrase “word and deed” in Luke, although apparently conventional, nonetheless appears in reverse order the seven other places in the New Testament it is used, such as Acts 7:22 (Moses is mighty “in words and in deeds”); and only once, in Jude, as it is in Luke. Therefore this order, the same as the Testimonium, cannot quite be taken for granted.

The prophets. In both texts, the predictions of the prophets, which occur at the end of the passages, are divided into two parts. (1) The prophets are first said to have told predictions that explain “these things” (ταῦτά in both), referring to the preceding accounts. In Josephus, “the prophets of God had foretold these things;” in Luke, “all which the prophets have spoken. Must not the Messiah suffer these things...?” (2) The prophets are said to predict, in addition, many unspecified things about him; in the Testimonium, “and a thousand other marvels about him”; in Luke, “and to enter into his glory. And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he explained to them in all the scriptures the things about himself.”

This specific division does not appear to have a simple parallel in other early Jesus texts, where prophetic statements are either cited directly at each point, or asserted globally for the entire expression of faith. We saw an example of the latter in the quotation from Justin. The closest to this division is in the speech of Acts 3:13-26; it does not seem to be a form of presentation chosen by later rules of faith.

The most interesting possibility is that “these things” was already in a source employed by Josephus, and that it was somewhat ambiguous – it is not completely clear what it encompasses in Luke – so that Josephus felt impelled to retain the term, rather than risk error by rewriting it more precisely. So also the nonspecific “thousand other marvels” may have been no more elucidative (what marvels?) in Josephus’ source, just as it is in Luke. Alternatives: if the Testimonium is a forgery, the author may have been subtly influenced by Luke or Acts 3. Otherwise, this coincidence is to be ascribed to chance: it is just one plausible way of introducing the prophecies after part of them were fulfilled, and the writer is not interested in covering them in detail.

The Indictment/Sentence/Crucifixion. In both texts there is no explanation for the death of Jesus, but rather a simple specification of the legal proceedings. (1) In both texts, the leaders’ role in presenting charges is briefly given: “indictment” (Josephus), “delivered” (Luke). (2) In both texts, a word is used for the sentencing decision: “condemned” (Josephus), “judgment” (Luke). (3) Finally, in both, crucifixion is explicitly stated as the outcome.

The brevity of this section is uncharacteristic of Josephus the historian,

¹⁶Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 99.

who, as many examples will attest, is interested in presenting the conflicting sides of an argument and, in general, in reasoning about the actions of his subjects. A good example for us is Josephus' description of a contemporary of Jesus' with a comparable career, John the Baptist (Ant 18.5.2 §116-119): John's teachings are described, the reason why John gives Herod cause for alarm, Herod's decision and the reasoning behind it, the execution (without formal accusation or sentencing), and its consequences. If Josephus did not include this level of explanation in Jesus' death, he quite probably did not know of it; and Luke's passage provides an example of the type of source that could have been available to Josephus which expresses the death in this manner. Once again, for explanation one either appeals to (a) chance, (b) some form of Lukan influence on a forger, or (c) a common source.

7 Coincidences of the Arabic Testimonium

The Testimonium quoted above is that found in existing Greek manuscripts, but there is another version available, in Arabic, to which attention has been drawn by Shlomo Pines, and which exhibits important differences.¹⁷ How does the Emmaus narrative of Luke compare with this version?

The Arabic Testimonium is quoted in the work of Agapius, an Arab Christian of the tenth century. Some skepticism must be applied to it. First, it is unknown whether this text, too, may have been deliberately altered at some point in its transmission. Second, during the time of Agapius many of the ancient Greek works that had been translated into Syriac were undergoing a second transmission into Arabic. If Agapius worked not from the Greek, but from a Syriac text of uncertain quality, as Pines suggests, the probability of corruption is great.

Here is the text, in Pines' translation:

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good and his learning outstanding. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon their discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after the crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.

The major differences from the Greek that attracted so much scholarly attention are the absence of the Christian affirmations that first raised the authenticity question. It is therefore thought that the Arabic version may preserve a more original form of the Josephan text, prior to later Christian interpolations.

There are four points that bear directly on this question of authenticity. Let us examine how these appear in the Greek Testimonium (abbreviated GT in the

¹⁷Shlomo Pines, *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and its Implications*, (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1971).

following), the Arabic Testimonium (AT), and the Emmaus narrative of Luke (L).

1. The GT “if indeed one can call him a man” has no parallel in either AT or L.
2. The GT “he was the Messiah” has no location parallel with either AT or L.
3. The AT has “They reported that he had appeared to them”, instead of the GT assertion that Jesus did appear to them. L here is indeterminate, since it itself is a dramatization of the report; compare, a few verses later, Luke 24:35, “they related the things in the highway.”
4. The AT “accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah:”

(a) The doubtful “perhaps” has no parallel anywhere in GT. Oddly enough, L does frame a doubt, albeit rhetorically, at this point: according to the prophets, “Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?”

(b) In the GT, the word “the Messiah (ὁ χριστός)” appears earlier, not at this location in the text. But L does employ it here, and no where else. This seems quite a surprising coincidence.

In regard to these four points, then, the Arabic Testimonium is actually closer to Luke than it is to the Greek Testimonium. This tends to support the theory that Luke’s narrative resembles the original version of the Testimonium, a resemblance that a later editor disrupted with interpolations.

There are other points where the Arabic Testimonium resembles Luke. The AT “his learning was outstanding” is arguably closer to L’s “mighty in word” than is the more elaborate phrasing of the GT; but some editions of Agapius render this as “he was known to be virtuous.”¹⁸ In AT, Jesus is “condemned to be crucified and to die,” with an explicit mention of death that has a parallel in L, “delivered to a judgment of death and crucified him,” but does not appear in GT’s “condemned him to be crucified.”

There are also points at which the AT differs from both GT and L: “his conduct was good” instead of a performer of wonderful deeds, although Pines has proposed that the Arabic may translate a Syriac original that read “he was a worker of fine deeds.”¹⁹ There is no mention of the leaders accusing Jesus in AT. The prophets are simplified to having predicted wonders, not also “these things.” The “third day” appears differently, but the form shown in the GT would have been difficult to translate.

¹⁸Pines, *An Arabic Version*, p. 16 n. 74 and p. 19 n.85.

¹⁹Pines, *An Arabic Version*, p. 34

8 Concluding Remarks and Two Speculations

The coincidences occurring between Josephus' description of Jesus and that found in the Emmaus narrative have not been previously appreciated. Those I have discussed fall into three classes:

(a) Detailed structural coincidences, beginning with the initial vocabulary cluster, that form a shared outline not found in comparable texts of the era;

(b) Coincidences at difficult textual points, the most peculiar being the participial form of the "third day," unique in, respectively, Josephus and Christian literature. Other points examined were a rare first person usage, and the presentation and terseness concerning Jesus' deeds, the predictions of the prophets, and the sentencing.

(c) Coincidences with the Arabic version of the Testimonium, which was shown to be, at the most critical points, more similar to the Emmaus narrative than it was to the received Greek version of the Testimonium.

Three explanations for these coincidences have been considered.

(1) They could be due to chance. But this would seem to gainsay the three independent forms of evidence listed above. In particular, it is difficult to ignore that the only two known examples of the "third day" as a participial phrase appears in texts with so many other structural resemblances. Some common literary milieu seems mandatory; the question is the form it took.

(2) The coincidences may be due to a Christian interpolator who altered the Testimonium, or forged it entire, under the influence of the Emmaus narrative. This proposal has the weakness of supposing that a writer capable of imitating Josephus' style and daring enough to alter his manuscript would at the same time employ non-Josephan expressions and adhere rather closely to a New Testament text. A forger of the required skill should have been able to shake free of such influences.

(3) Josephus and Luke may have used similar or identical sources in composing their passages. This explanation appears to be the simplest. It not only explains the series of coincidences, but it also goes a long way toward solving a number of mysteries that have bothered commentators of the Testimonium. What does Josephus mean by calling Jesus a wise man? What was the nature of the accusation by the leaders? If the passage is authentic, why does it approximate to a Christian creed? All these questions fall away if it were true that Josephus did little but rewrite a concise narrative that had, so to speak, crossed his desk. He may have known more about Jesus, or he may have known nothing but what was in his source; in either case, when it came to composing his own passage, it would have been easier and more accurate for him to adhere to a reliable source rather than to piece together secondhand knowledge.

The last explanation provides a new tool for exploring both Josephus' Testimonium and the transmission of ancient Christian gospels. I will present two speculations along these lines.

First, the original form of the Testimonium as written by Josephus, without the later interpolations, may now be more identifiable. If Luke indeed is similar to Josephus' source, and if the Arabic Testimonium of Agapius is not too cor-

rupt, then we should be able to approximate the original by a simple “Majority Rule” methodology: accept as authentic those elements that appear in two out of the three texts, Josephus, Luke, and Agapius. Here is one proposal for the authentic text derived using this Rule:

About this time there was Jesus, a wise man. He was a performer of unusual deeds and a teacher of those who heard truth with pleasure, and he won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to death on a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. They reported he appeared to them spending a third day alive again, and accordingly, that he was perhaps the Messiah, for the prophets of God had prophesied these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the sect of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.

This reconstruction differs from that of many commentators in that it retains the entire sentence describing Jesus’ resurrection appearance and the declarations of the prophets. That sentence had been doubted because it was a core Christian belief that seemed impossible for Josephus to assert. Yet it is found in all three of our texts; when cast in the above form, as a report not an assertion, it is not implausible; and, furthermore, it explains why the Christians “did not cease” and have still “not disappeared.”

The other speculation I wish to make concerns the origin of the source. Luke attributes his tradition to Cleopas and his companion. As mentioned above, Cleopas might well have been the father of Simon, the leader of the Jerusalem Church after James died circa 62 C.E. Now, the only other passage in Josephus that mentions Jesus is the description of the death of James (Ant. 20.9.1 §200-203). I speculate that both this description of James’ death and the description of Jesus that served as the basis for the Testimonium were obtained by Josephus from the Jerusalem Church during Simon’s tenure. This church had an interest in both (a) the facts behind James’ fate, which led to Simon’s succession, and (b) the testimony of Cleopas, which asserted that the first disciple to whom Jesus appeared was the father of Simon (if we have identified Cleopas correctly), and so would establish his authority. Moreover, Josephus seems to treat James and the Jewish Christians with sympathy. This theory is purely a guess, as Josephus could have had other sources for the death of James, as it was the central act of Ananus during his high priesthood; but the idea of a common origin for the two Jesus references in the Antiquities has an attractive symmetry. Perhaps researchers more expert than I in the transmission of ancient gospels can shed further light on these questions.

I wish to thank Professor Louis Feldman for many helpful comments, and Professor James Charlesworth for his encouragement.