Jesus among the Historians:  
How the Manuscripts of Josephus Changed Over Time and What They Originally Said: A Survey of Recent Scholarship

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Summary

• Manuscripts of the Antiquities of Josephus contain two refs. to Jesus Christ: the Testimonium Flavianum (in book 18) and a reference to James the brother of Jesus (in book 20).

• Recent publications by Richard Carrier, Louis Feldman, G.J. Goldberg, Paul Hopper, Ken Olson, and Alice Whealey shed new light on what happened, altering what we should conclude about what Josephus originally wrote.

• All surviving manuscripts of the Antiquities derive from the last manuscript of it produced at the Christian library of Caesarea between 220 and 320 A.D.

• Both references to Jesus were probably added after their first custodian, Origen (who had no knowledge of them), but by the time of their last custodian, Eusebius (who is the first to find them there). The long one deliberately; the short one accidentally.

• The additions may have been made by, or at the direction or under the supervision of, Eusebius, or his predecessor at the library, Origen’s successor, Pamphilus.

• Reliance on the Arabic version of the TF must be discarded. Attempts to invent a pared-down version of what Josephus wrote are untenable. The TF derives from the NT, doesn’t match Josephan narrative practice or context, and matches Eusebian more than Josephan style. Previous opinions on the James passage were unaware of new research; thus need revision.

Traditional Essential Bibliography


New Essential Bibliography

Alice Whealey. 2016. “The Testimonium Flavianum.” A Companion to Josephus in His World, eds. Honora Howell Chapman and Zuleika Rodgers (John Wiley & Sons), pp. 345–55. [Which fails to take into account any of the following (except Whealey 2008 and Olson 1999), which is reflective of the problem that needs correcting.]


www.richardcarrier.info/testimonium.pdf
Whealey Refutes Pines:

4th century

Eusebius publishes
Historia Ecclesiastica

5th century

Syriac translation of Eusebius's
Historia Ecclesiastica

8th century

Theophilus of Edessa's
Syriac Chronicle

10th century

Agapius's
Arabic Chronicle

12th century

Michael the Syrian's
Syriac Chronicle

Whealey’s Alternative Unlikely:

Theory 1

Eusebius wrote
"he was the Christ"

because

Josephus wrote
"he was believed to be the Christ"

in

Demonstratio Evangelica
3.5

Then
Someone altered all
manuscripts of this to say
"he was"

And
Someone altered all
manuscripts of this to say
"he was"

And
Someone altered all
manuscripts of this to say
"he was"

in

Historia
1.11

Théophaneia
5.44

Jeremiah
13.3-44

Theory 2

Eusebius wrote
"he was the Christ"

because

His manuscript of
the JA (ancestor to
all our mss. of the
JA) read "he was
the Christ"

in

Demonstratio
Evangelica
3.5

Then one
manuscript of
this was altered
to say "he was
believed to be"

That manuscript
was used by Jerome

Then 200 years later a
descendant of that manuscript
was used to produce the
Syriac tradition used by
Agapius and Michael

[Contra Whealey, Theophilus or Michael may have emended the text to match Jerome’s or a descendant of the manuscript of Eusebius employed by Jerome. Or the variant isn’t Jerome’s: the Greek translation of De
Vir. Ill. 13 reads “was” and not “was believed to be.”]

[Whealey’s thesis also requires that three extant mss. of the Syriac Historia all derive from yet another textual
tradition emended to “was the Christ” while somehow Michael & Agapius had access to an un-emended text,
even though no such text is extant.]
Observations:

• TF doesn’t fit the context of JA 18.62 and 65
• TF is implausible from a Pharisaic Jew (e.g. Jesus declared messiah, fulfilled prophecy)
• TF is improbably brief (contrast the religious controversy immediately following in the JA)
• TF is improbably obscure (contrast Josephus on other sects, teachings, actions, and terms)
• TF was unknown to Origen (despite his explicit search of Josephus for Jesus material)
• Rewriting the TF to ‘solve’ these problems is baseless speculation, not empirical argument

New Results Ignored Even in Recent Publications (e.g. Whealey 2016):

• Content, concepts, and sequence of the TF matches Luke (Goldberg 1995)
• Style of the TF more Eusebian than Josephan (Olson 2013; Feldman 2012)
• Narrative structure of the TF not Josephan (time, story, emplotment, apologetic: Hopper 2014)
• All manuscripts of JA are descended from the Eusebian (Whealey 2008; Carrier 2012)
• Apart from them, there is no evidence the JA ever contained the TF in any form.

• James passage unknown to Origen (despite search of Josephus for Jesus material)
• Origen mistook a story in Hegesippus as being in Josephus (Carrier 2012)
• All other accounts of the death of James the brother of Jesus do not match Josephus
• Acts used Josephus, yet never noticed this (despite Jews punished for persecuting Christians)
• Josephus would explain things; only a Christian would just assume they were known (e.g. what a “Christ” was; that James was a Christian; that Jews sought to kill Christians; why the Jewish elite and Roman authorities opposed the killing of James if he was a Christian)
• The words *tou legomenou christou*, “the one called Christ,” likely a marginal note (by Origen or Pamphilus or another scribe or scholar in their library), expressing belief rather than fact
• That note was then accidentally interpolated into the ms. produced or used by Eusebius (which would have been a copy of the one used by Origen)
• Possibly replacing *ton tou damnaiou*, “the son of Damneus” (repetition of that phrase a few lines after may have led a scribe to suspect the marginal note was correcting a dittograph)
• All arguments against interpolation have assumed the entire passage was interpolated (not just the one phrase) and that it was deliberate (instead of accidental or conjectural).