

FORT BEND CHRISTIAN ACADEMY - APOLOGETICS

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LETTERS TO THE EMPEROR

ALLYSON PETERS

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INTRODUCTION

Yenikoy, Istanbul, Turkey (41° 7' 0" N, 29° 3' 0" E)

Greetings Dr. Adamson,

Our fifty-fourth day on the Yenikoy excavation site in Istanbul, Turkey, returned an exciting piece of history: a mostly preserved exchange of letters between Constantine the Great and an unknown Roman researcher named Ovidius Quinctilius Calvus. Last week a section of the old walls of Constantinople was unearthed. Nestled against one of the walls, among various bits of debris, our head archaeologist Dr. Wallis Lyon discovered an ornate box dating back to the third century. After a thorough examination of the box's exterior, the lock was broken, and the box was carefully opened to reveal its contents. Inside the box were many fairly well preserved letters containing the seal of Emperor Constantine the Great.

These letters were immediately sent to our analysis team, who were able to decipher and translate a vast majority of the letters, retaining great accuracy in the original words of the Emperor. The first letters were written in 307 C.E., which places them several years before Constantine's famous vision that sparked the Christian revival in the Empire of Rome. The series of letters concludes at the very beginning of 313 C.E., about a month before Constantine signed the Edict of Milan. They seem to be informative letters written to Constantine concerning Christians and Jesus of Nazareth with the use of reports from non-Christian sources written in the first and second centuries. These letters contain both an insight as to Emperor Constantine's mindset regarding Christians in the years before his famous Edict of Milan and reports of early secular sources describing Christianity, including those of Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, and others. These letters are an exciting discovery that provides insight into the beginnings of tolerant Christianity in the Roman Empire and include secular sources that indicate the

historicity and character of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. I have included in this letter the translated manuscripts of the dialogue between Emperor Constantine the Great and the writer Ovidius for you to read and document.

TO OVIDIUS

Ianuarius 15, consulate of Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximianus Herculus Augustus

First letter of Emperor Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus,ⁱ to Ovidius

Quinctilius Calvus, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium.

Peace and greetings be to you, my dear Ovidius. It has been brought to my attention of a curious cult, which has begun to accumulate in locations around the Roman Republic. These men seem to have a most perplexing belief, as they come from a branch of traditional Judaism yet are quite unlike their predecessors. These Christian men adhere to a completely new religion, a creed that is quickly spreading through the mighty ranks of Rome. "Christian" is the name that the members of this new eccentric cult have bestowed upon themselves, a name after the man they worship and whom they call Christ, a man who died hundreds of years ago yet is said to still be alive this very day. My curiosity about this growing religion is insatiable, and as I covet knowledge about the goings on in my empire, I have appointed you as the champion of my task. I ask you, esteemed Ovidius, to inform me to the best of your ability of the creed and beliefs of these people who call themselves Christians. I desire to know the derivation of this cult, the location from whence they originated, and the identity of this man they call the Christ. I ask for sources not of Christian origin, as such sources might be erroneous of the truth, but instead, your journey must be in search of sources of Greek, Jewish, and Roman derivation, all written soon after the death of the Christian leader. Gather every source you can find, every manuscript and scroll, and on every occasion that you discover new information about this cult, send me a letter describing the source from whence it came, the original text itself as written by the hand of such Greek, Jew, or Roman, and the facts you take from the writings about the Christians. Take whatever supplies you may need for your journey, and as you find what you are looking for, send

reports to the capital. As I receive your letters, I will respond as much as I am able. Thank you, my dear friend, for your service to the Empire in this time.

TO CONSTANTINE

Martius 30, consulate of Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximianus Herculus Augustusⁱⁱ

First letter of Ovidius, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium, and Seneca Matius Concessus, *scriba*, to
Imperator Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus, our most pious emperor and most
beloved of the gods.

Peace be to our beloved ruler, Imperator Constantinus Augustus. I must tell you that I felt
nothing short of absolute joy at hearing of your noble request, my lord, and in my haste to begin
my journey I will depart in a mere two days time in order to undertake your righteous challenge.
I take no one with me besides my scribe, Seneca, who may document and send letters to the
capital as I find information about this religion, and the supplies necessary to begin my unique
undertaking. I tell you that I have little experience myself with this cult, nothing truly apart from
the rumors I hear floating in the province of Byzantium, but as I discover the secrets you desire, I
will send you my reports so that you may learn more of this new rising religious movement. Any
questions I may have I will deliver unto your knowledge, that you may determine the motives of
these Christians and whether you believe that what they say is the absolute truth or crooked lies,
as is the belief held by many a Roman civilian. My lord, upon my honor I will bring you the
information you desire.

TO CONSTANTINE

JOSEPHUS FLAVIUS

December 25, consulate of Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximianus Herculius Augustusⁱⁱⁱ

Second letter of Ovidius, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium, to my lord Emperor Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus

Mighty Emperor Constantine, my first discovery is of the account of a man who was born a Jew, yet died a Roman. Joseph ben Matthais, referred to furthermore in this letter as the man called Josephus, was born in Jerusalem as a descendent of royalty and high priesthood during the consulate of the mighty Caesar Augustus Germanicus and Claudius Drusus Nero.^{iv} As a result of his birth of extreme privilege, Josephus was given the opportunity to study with three of the four factions of Judaism: the Pharisees, teachers of law, the Sadducees, the priestly caste, and the Essenes, who resided peacefully in the desert, until he decided to continue his studies as a Pharisee.^v During the consulate of Luccius Telesinus and Suetonius Paulinus^{vi} he joined the Jewish rebellion as a general of Jewish forces in Galilee and succeeded in defending the mighty fortress at Jotapata until he was overrun by our greater forces and retreated far underground in search of refuge. While in hiding, Josephus and his men refused to be taken captive by our emperor, Caesar Vespasianus Augustus, and they consequently decided to draw lots to determine the order by which each man would be killed and by whom. The first man who was chosen would be killed by the man who chose second, who would in turn be killed by the man who chose third, so on and so forth. Our Josephus had the luck, or misfortune rather, to draw last out of the survivors. When only Josephus and the second to last man were still living, Josephus twisted his promises and manipulated the other survivor into surrendering. The two men were taken before Vespasian, who was at such time not yet our emperor, and instead of being

sentenced for execution as expected, since such an action was custom for a prisoner of war of this caliber, Josephus prophesied the rise of our emperor Vespasian to power. Once again, due to his twisting of words Josephus was spared his grisly fate and was taken as Vespasian's prisoner for two years until Josephus's prophecy came true and Vespasian became the Emperor of Rome. Josephus was accordingly freed by our emperor, whereby Josephus took his savior's family name of Flavius. This turncoat Jew, now the esteemed Roman, Josephus Flavius, continued his betrayal of his Jewish heritage as he interceded for Emperor Titus with the Jews who held Jerusalem, but when his former allies refused to surrender, Josephus Flavius watched Jerusalem be overrun and his family captured. He continued to prosper under the reign of the Flavius emperors until his death during the consulate of Cornelius Tacitus and Cocceius Nerva Caesar Augustus.^{vii} During the consulate of Pompeius Collega and Cornelius Priscus,^{viii} he published his work that is of most value to our quest, dear Emperor, the twenty-book volume of the *Jewish Antiquities*.^{ix} In this work, my lord, there is mention of the man they call Jesus. I present before you the two references to this Christ, that you may discern what is true and what is false.

From his work, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18, Chapter 3 comes a reference of the Christ of these people who call themselves Christians. It is said,

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principle men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.^x

While that is the only explicit reference to their Jesus, from the same work comes a reference to the brother of their Christ called James. In Book 20, Chapter 9 of *Antiquities of the Jews* it is said,

Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some other, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king . . .^{xi}

Lastly, the most descriptive reference to the early men of Christianity comes from the same *Antiquities of the Jews*, yet describes the man John, called Baptist. It states,

Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that was the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body; supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness. Now when others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved by hearing his words. Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise,) thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when he would be too late. Accordingly, he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death. Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure to him.^{xii}

My lord, my discoveries from the words of Josephus are many, yet these findings lead to a number of questions. In the single paragraph that Josephus writes about Jesus, Josephus refers to Jesus as a wise man, a miracle worker, and teacher of the people. It is said that this man also gathered a large following yet was turned over by his own people, his own followers who had previously praised his name, and was given to Pontius Pilate, who sent Jesus to be nailed to a cross and crucified. All but Christ's most loyal followers left him once he was announced dead in the tomb, yet when it was said he rose from the dead after the third day, which the Christians claim as fulfillment of the prophecies mentioned in the Old Testament about the Savior, his

faithful followers grew in number. To this day, the cult of Christianity has not died and grows stronger than ever.^{xiii} My lord, I cannot help but find it curious that although Jesus is said by the Christians to be a great leader, he is referenced but only briefly in the works of Josephus.

Jesus was not the only man of the early church who Josephus mentioned in his *Antiquities*; John, who the people called Baptist, is discussed in more detail than his Christ. Josephus tells us of the character of John, that he was a teacher of virtue, righteousness, and piety to the god of the Christians. He preached the redemptive nature of the act he called baptism, which was said to remove iniquities and purify the sinner. This man, like Jesus who would come after, gathered a great following of many loyal men and women. His popularity was supposedly so great that Herod was threatened by the number of John's followers and had John taken prisoner and killed.^{xiv} This man seems to be a contemporary of Jesus. Similar in teachings and morality to their Christ, the Christian John the Baptist was martyred for his loyalty to his god, yet I can find no words attributing resurrection to John, as they do to Jesus.

The third mention of a Christian man during the time of Jesus was that of his brother James. He is only briefly mentioned as being on a trial in front of Sanhedrin judges for breaking the law (though it is not specifically mentioned as to what law he was in fact charged with breaking) and is sentenced to a stoning.^{xv} There are no further details in regards to the fate of James and the people who were with him, men whom I can only assume were more of the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth.

My lord, I send this letter in hopes that my first discoveries have been sufficient to meet your standards. I have already begun to research my next source, that of a Roman man named Cornelius Tacitus, and will send my letter to you as I gather all of my resources. I eagerly

anticipate your response. May Rome flourish under your mighty reign, my lord Emperor
Constantinus Augustus.

TO CONSTANTINE
CORNELIUS TACITUS

Februarius 7, consulate of C. Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus Augustus X and C. Galerius
Valerius Maximianus Augustus VII^{xvi}

Third letter of Ovidius, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium, written to Imperator Flavius Valerius
Aurelius Constantinus Augustus

My lord Emperor Constantinus Augustus, this is one of the more famous men I have discovered in my searching about the man Jesus of Nazareth. Born around the time of the consulate of Antistius Vetus and Suillius Nerullinus,^{xvii} Cornelius Tacitus was one of the most famous Roman senators of our empire's glorious history. He held some of the most important and influential offices of the Roman Empire, including but not limited to the offices of quaestor, tribunate of the plebs, praetor, membership of *Xvir*, and consul.^{xviii} He wrote his work *Histories* over a span of eleven or twelve years, of which they were finally completed and compiled around the time of the great consulate of Scipio Salvidienus Orfitus and Peducaeus Priscinus.^{xix} Following the circulation of his *Histories*, Cornelius Tacitus wrote his next work, *Annals*, which spanned the period of history between the reigns of Emperor Tiberius to Emperor Nero. It is best assumed that the *Annals* were written during the time of Emperor Hadrian; however the exact date attributed to the *Annals* is unknown, as it is not recorded when Tacitus eventually died.^{xx} The writings of Tacitus, my lord, give us a great insight as to how the early inhabitants of Rome viewed these new Christians.

From the 15th book, 44th chapter of his *Annals*, Tacitus writes of Emperor Nero and his treatment of the Christians after the Great Fire of Rome when he says,

And there were sacred banquets and nightly vigils celebrated by married women. But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order.

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt [for the instigation of the Fire of Rome] and inflected the most exquisite tortures on a class hatred for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.^{xxi}

Furthermore, it is said by Tacitus,

Nero had offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.^{xxii}

Emperor Constantine, from the sources of Roman senator Cornelius Tacitus come more explanations of the history of this sect called Christianity. They received their name from Christus, or the man they call the Christ; from the title they gave to the man Jesus came the name of the Christians. This leader of the Christians was said to have been tortured and killed during the reign of Emperor Tiberius Caesar by the rule of Pontius Pilate, prefect of the province of Judaea. After the death of Jesus Christ, it appears that the religion of Christianity was stifled momentarily, as if jarred after the sudden death of their leader. However, it was soon revived after his death in the province of Judaea, which was the location where Christianity first appeared. Christianity was referred to, even in that time, as a superstition, bringing to mind cultish magic and witchcraft. Despite the resentment towards Christians in Rome, Christianity still flourished in the city, much to the dismay of the Roman officials.^{xxiii} My lord, there seems to

be no force that can stop these Christians from spreading their religion across Rome!

Senator Tacitus wrote about the treatment of the Christians during the reign of the mighty Emperor Nero. The Christians were brutally persecuted during the reign of the Caesar, as he blamed the followers of Jesus for the Great Fire that destroyed the city of Rome. Reeling from the destruction caused by the fire, our people were searching for the cause of this ruin. Their suspicions rested on the emperor. Could this man sworn to protect the Empire of Rome have planned this deadly fire? Nevertheless, the people were looking for answers where none could be found. To transfer the blame off from himself, Emperor Nero claimed that the Christians were culpable for the raging fire of Rome. The Christians were henceforth brutally tortured as our people called for their blood, and the Caesar only fueled the flame. He placed the harshest punishments upon the Christians, as he punished them for crimes it was never proved they committed. As castigation for the Fire of Rome, Nero ordered that all Christians who did not recant of their religion and deny their faith in Christ be arrested. The number of Christians even in the city had grown dramatically, and a great number were convicted upon the charge of a hatred of mankind. Christians were punished and even killed in mocking and cruel ways, such as being burnt at the stake and nailed to crosses. In an attempt to deemphasize the harshness of the deaths of the Christians, Nero treated their executions as entertainment. The punishments were so brutal that even criminals felt pity for the condemned.^{xxiv} O my Emperor, it pains me to hear of these punishments granted to men who did no wrong, as no man should be condemned to suffer unreasonably for any crime.

My lord, the wars with Maxentius cause trouble for my research, as I must tread carefully as to not encounter unwanted attention or danger. As I present to you the words of Tacitus, I must warn you that I may be unable to send you my next report until a later date.

TO OVIDIUS

Sextilis 18, consulate of C. Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus Augustus X and C. Galerius Valerius

Maximianus Augustus VII^{xxv}

Second letter of Imperator Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus, to Ovidius,

annalium scriptor of Byzantium.

It pleases me greatly that you Ovidius, my worthy historian, have undertaken my great task and have done so in such stunning fashion. After reading of your letters, I admit that I am most consumed with interest about these Christians, and the two sources with which you have provided me have already proven invaluable to my research of this curious religion. As you have noted, the battles between Maxentius and myself have increased both in number and in danger. If you happen to not hear a response from me for some time, my dear Ovidius, it is not for lack of want that my messages are not delivered, but for lack of resources and time during this era of war. I must request that you continue your expedition despite our current predicament, for I trust that you will remain safe and cautious on your journey. Esteemed Ovidius, I thank you for your service at this troubling time, but for now, let me begin my attentions to the words of Josephus Flavius and Senator Cornelius Tacitus that you so bravely sent to me.

FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS:

First, I will turn my attention to what I may discern about the writings of the first source bestowed to me, that of the Roman Josephus Flavius. While everything said by Josephus seems to align with what has previously been said about Jesus by the Christians, it is curious to me that he would write the statement, "He was the Christ."^{xxvi} My dear Ovidius, I cannot help but begin to question the validity of this statement, and I have a difficult time accepting this quote as if it

was written by the hand of Josephus himself. A man born a Jew who betrayed his own people only to survive as a Roman citizen seems unlikely to become a Christian and believe that this man Jesus is the Christ, a Christ who was constantly foretold about in the holy books of Judaism he studied as a child under the teachings of the Pharisees. This renegade Pharisee would not have historically accepted Jesus of Nazareth as Christ, and I must tell you that I find it concerning that it was written in the manuscript you have presented to me. Nothing from this sentence is reminiscent of anything else written by Josephus, and, while I find it difficult to believe that the entire section of the writings of Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, is a false account, I must remain skeptical of a quotation that seems to ascribe Josephus to Christianity.

However, while I do admit to having much difficulty in believing that it was Josephus who wrote, "He was the Christ"^{xvii} when referring to Jesus, I have no trouble believing that the attributions to John the Baptist were accurate in origin. From my own personal, yet sorely limited, research into the subjects and recordings of Christianity, John the Baptist was indeed widely known as a holy man, but by no means was he the Christ as prophesied in the holy books of the Pharisees. Furthermore, this passage made no declaration to Christianity nor is it a reference to Jesus of Nazareth; therefore, it is more likely that the description of John the Baptist was historically accurate from the sources of Josephus Flavius. This brings another series of discoveries that we may add to our list, dear Ovidius. For example, the Jews were obviously fond of this Baptist if they believed that he was the cause of the destruction of Herod's army. However, from what I have heard of the Jews, these people were not nearly as fond of Jesus of Nazareth as they were of John the Baptist. This again corresponds directly with the writings of the Christian New Testament, more specifically in the Gospel attributed to the man named Matthew, which states that this man John, called Baptist, gained a great following and was killed

by Herod Antipas.^{xxviii} It is also curious to note that the section Josephus attributes to John the Baptist is much longer than the one attributed to Jesus. Perhaps this is making a statement that, as a former Jew himself, Josephus felt pity or admiration for John the Baptist, much more than he did for Jesus of Nazareth, though I can only hypothesize as to the true meanings of the words of Josephus with the use of only such limited sources and materials.

I must thank you, my dear Ovidius, for this opportunity for adventure and insight into the question of Christianity! I will continue to research this man John, called Baptist, and his relations with both the man Jesus of Nazareth and the early movement of the Christians.

I now will return to continuing in my analysis of the words of Josephus Flavius, for I must say that out of the three references made to these three famous men of Christianity, I believe that the quotation about James seems to be the most historically accurate that is ascribed to Josephus. I must explain to you my reasoning for this claim, for it is because of the lack of Josephus's attribution to Jesus of Nazareth in this passage. As it appears, in the source you have given me, Josephus is not talking about the trial of James, but rather the surrounding passage (which I must admit I researched in order to find the message in its entirety) is describing the promotion of Albinus to the role of Judean procurator and whether the Sadducee Ananus, son of a man also named Ananus, had the authority to assemble the Sanhedrim for the trial of James without Albinus's consent.^{xxix} It is coincidental that it gives mention of James at all, and by no means has this passage been turned into a declaration of allegiance to Jesus, who is not even mentioned in the surrounding context except in his earthly relation to his brother James. There would be no reason for a follower of Christ to change this passage, nor does it appear to me that there is any evidence of a Christian having done so, and therefore there is no need to assume that

this may be a falsified manuscript, as it may have occurred in the reference to Jesus previously in the writings of Josephus.

CORNELIUS TACITUS:

Next I turn my attention to the works of the man called Cornelius Tacitus. I cannot help but notice that Tacitus seems to pity these poor Christians, whom he believes have been wrongly punished. I must note that it is curious that the people of Rome at first seemed to blame the Emperor Nero for the destructive fire, but, alas, that is not my focus in this letter and will be reserved for a conversation at a later date. Dear Ovidius, the writings of Tacitus align with what I have already heard of the treatment of the early Christians and they also appear to echo some of what Josephus wrote about Jesus of Nazareth and his followers. The Christians, because of their curiously cultish actions, were sought out and viciously persecuted by Jews and Romans alike, as they were brutally blamed by Nero for the Great Fire that ravaged Rome. What I find most intriguing about the words of Tacitus is the source from whence they originated. Cornelius Tacitus, according to your description, was considered to be in high standing with Rome at the time of his writings and may have received information from the official records of Rome, adding legitimacy to the writings of Tacitus as you have sent in your letters. Furthermore, of much interest is the phrase, "thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea,"^{xxx} as Tacitus may be referring to the belief that the Christians hold of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.^{xxxi} As stated also in the writings of Josephus, the number of Christian followers declined after the death of Jesus at the hands of the people and Pontius Pilate, but they grew quickly in number soon after it is said that Jesus was resurrected. The fact that Tacitus mentioned the revival of the Christian sect yet did not mention the possible resurrection of Jesus suggests one of two scenarios, either that Tacitus could have not known the cause of the sudden

revival of Christianity in both Judaea and Rome or, what I perhaps believe is the more likely scenario taking into account the fact that Tacitus most likely had access to the official records of Rome during his time of writing, that Tacitus had in fact heard of the many circulating rumors of the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth as the cause of the restoration of Christianity, yet still refused to mention it in his writings. Either scenario is plausible considering the circumstances; however, Ovidius, it cannot be denied that Christianity grew at a pace more rapid than any other sect in history. Interestingly enough, and contrary to other religious sects I have previously had knowledge of, Christianity grew after the death of its leader, rather than completely disappeared, as has been the regular sequence of events in situations such as these.

Thank you, my dear Ovidius, for your continuous and unfailing devotion to Rome. Your service is invaluable to me at this time, and I must thank you for the research and the task you have merely just begun to accomplish. May you remain safe in your journey and remain unworried if you do not hear a response from me in a timely manner, for I will return a report to you as soon as I am able.

TO CONSTANTINE

PLINY THE YOUNGER

November 23, consulate of C. Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus Augustus X and C. Galerius Valerius Maximianus Augustus VII^{xxxii}

Fourth letter of Ovidius, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium, to our beloved Emperor Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus

Emperor Constantine, most beloved of the gods, I write to you to report of our next source, that of the famous historian Pliny the Younger. Pliny the Younger was born with the name Gaius Caecilius Cilo in the Roman city of Novum Comum and was the adopted son and biological nephew of the Roman statesman and historian Pliny the Elder.^{xxxiii} As the result of his adoptive father's fame, the younger Pliny was highly educated in his youth and studied under the famed Roman rhetorician Marcus Fabius Quintilianus.^{xxxiv} When he turned seventeen years of age, Pliny the Elder was killed during the evacuation of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, as he was the commanding officer of the fleet sent in to vacate the surroundings. At the age of 19, Pliny the Younger became lawyer of his first court, a minor centumviral court hearing cases concerning property.^{xxxv} After a short time in the military, Pliny the Younger became the *quaestor augusti* under Titus Flavius Caesar Domitianus Augustus, where he conveyed the Emperor's messages to and from the senate. He rose in power and position until, in conjunction with the year of Gaius Julius Cornutus Tertullus, he became consul under the reign of Emperor Caesar Nerva Traianus Divi Nervae filius Augustus.^{xxxvi} You may recount his famous speech *Panegyricus Traiani* when he was chosen as consul.^{xxxvii} In the year of Minucius Rufus and Spurius Postumius Albinus, he was appointed as the Emperor's legate in the province of Bithynia-Pontus. During his time in the province, he wrote a series of letters as reports to Trajan.

In his letter to our Emperor Trajan, Pliny writes of his encounters with Christians when he notes,

"It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never participated in trials of Christians, I therefore do not know what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent. And I have been not a little hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age or no difference between the very young and the more mature; whether pardon is to be granted for repentance, or, if a man has once been a Christian, it does him no good to have ceased to be one; whether the name itself, even without offenses, or only the offenses associated with the name are to be punished.

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ--none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do--these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter

seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found. Hence it is easy to imagine that a multitude of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is afforded."^{xxxviii}

My lord, the discovery of this source is excellent news. The correspondence of Pliny the Younger with the honored Emperor Trajan has brought to light an unusual account of the Christians during the reign of the mighty Caesar. Pliny the Younger reveals that the Christians were incarcerated and placed on trial before the matter was considered significant enough to be brought to him. There appears to have been no standard procedure to deal with the Christians at this time, as Pliny the Younger seems puzzled as to what should be done about the Christians.^{xxxix} If there had been no procedure in place, then most likely there were areas in the Empire that had harsher and more brutal punishments for the Christians than others. However, these Christians, despite having already spread past Rome to the surrounding provinces, seem to have not yet become an insurmountable national problem, as they appear to have become during the writings of Josephus and Tacitus. The account of Pliny the Younger seems to mark the time when Caesar first became involved in the affairs of this new cult. During this time, Pliny the Younger had been executing Christians who refused to recant even after they had been granted two or three chances to annul their allegiance to the man they call Christ.^{xl} I am as astounded at the stubbornness of these people as Pliny! What man would abandon his life because of a few misplaced words? All that must be done to atone for their disobedience to the Emperor was to praise the name of Caesar and the gods of Rome and curse their Christ Jesus of Nazareth. Their creed was acceptable, but they had been blaspheming the title given to the Emperor and attributing it to an ordinary man. These people were being killed, yet they seemed to think that

devotion to their Christ was more important than their adherence to the Caesar.

In this account from Pliny the Younger there is a description of the religious rites these Christians undertook as part of the allegiance to their Christ. They were said to have met on a certain day every week when they would worship the Christ. While at their gathering, they would eat food that Pliny said was "ordinary and innocent."^{xli} It is intriguing that he felt the need to mention the food specifically. Even in Rome we have religious rites that require food, but it is unexplained why they are adopting this act as one of their actions to glorify their Christ. Pliny seems unconcerned with this ritual, but I cannot help but question as to what might be the meaning of this deed. In addition, on the day which they worship the Christ the Christians would swear an oath not to partake in certain transgressions, not only illegal acts such as theft and fraud, but also immoral acts such as lying and adultery. I have no choice but to agree with the Christians on this point. These men and women have the integrity to be ideal citizens of Rome but for their obsession with this man they call Christ. Despite the disapproval that the Christians receive, it seems to me that these Christians are good people.

Emperor Constantine, I promised to present to you all facts that I may discover, but if I may be so bold, I cannot help but tell you my own thoughts as well. I refuse to retract my previous statement: These Christians are good people. They are not reminiscent of ordinary criminals or felons in the slightest, yet they are being punished. I feel remorse for these people. With more confusion than I felt before I embarked on this mission, I deliver these letters unto you, Emperor Constantine, for your judgment and analysis.

TO CONSTANTINE

GAIUS SUETONIUS TRANQUILLUS

Mercedonius 2, consulate of Caesar C. Valerius Licinianus Licinius Augustus^{xlii}

Fifth letter of Ovidius, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium, and Ovidius, scribe, to Emperor

Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus, our most pious emperor and most beloved of the gods.

Honorable Emperor Constantine, next I stumbled upon the works of the great ancient Roman historian, Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus. This man was born of the Equestrian rank in Hippo, Africa, in the year of the consulate of Caesar Vespasianus Augustus III and Titus Caesar Vespasianus.^{xliii} He was educated in law and was a friend of the historian Pliny the Younger, who we already discussed in my previous report. He also took office in Rome as the director of imperial libraries under Emperor Caesar Nerva Traianus Divi Nervae filius Augustus, the 13th Emperor of the Roman Empire. He was promoted to the office of the *ab epistulis* under the reign of Publius Aelius Hadrianus, 14th Emperor of the Roman Empire.^{xliv} You may have heard of his works *De Viris Illustribus* and *De vita Caesarum*. Of these two works our interests are better served in the latter, which as you know discusses in detail the reign of the Roman Emperors from the first great Gaius Iulius Caesar to Titus Flavius Caesar Domitianus Augustus, the 11th Emperor of the Roman Empire. Suetonius wrote this work with sources from the libraries he had access to while under the command of Emperor Trajan.^{xlv} Two references to aid our research of the Christians and their leader Jesus of Nazareth are found in *De vita Caesarum* during the reigns of Emperor Nero and Emperor Claudius.

The description written by Suetonius about the reign of Emperor Nero in *De vita Caesarum* states,

"Under his rule, many practices were reprov'd and subject to controls and many new laws were passed. A limit was imposed on expenditure. Public feasts were reduced to food handouts. With the exception of beans and vegetables, the sale of hot food in taverns was prohibited - previously all kinds of delicacies had been available. Punishments were imposed on the Christians-- adherents of a new and dangerous superstition. A ban was placed on the diversions of the charioteers, who for a long time had taken advantage of the freedom they enjoyed to wander about the city playing tricks on people and robbing them. At the same time, the pantomime actors and their associates were outlawed from the city."^{xlvi}

In a brief second reference during the reign of Emperor Claudius, Suetonius writes, "The Jews he expelled from Rome, since they were constantly in rebellion, at the instigation of Chrestus."^{xlvii}

Emperor Constantine, from the sources of Suetonius we can gather information about the Christians during the sovereignty of mighty Nero and celebrated Claudius. Under the emperors of Nero, the Christians were brutally and cruelly punished because they were thought of as a superstitious cult bent on plaguing the Roman Empire. These Christians received their name from the man Suetonius refers to as Chrestus,^{xlvi} who is assumed to be the man Jesus, the leader of the Christian cult. Curiously, the source of Suetonius makes the claim that it was Jesus, or Chrestus, who was inciting the revolts by the Jews.

During the reign of Emperor Claudius, the Jews, and presumably the sect of Christians as well, acted rebellious in nature. Claudius Caesar was in power in Rome from the years ruled by the consulate of Caesar Augustus Germanicus and Gnaeus Sentius Saturninus to the consulate of Acilius Aviola and Marcus Asinius Marcellus.^{xlvi} As Suetonius is describing the years during the reign of Claudius, it must have been during those years that the Jews were expelled from Rome.¹ The expulsion of the Jews agrees with the history of Rome, as from my time spent with the

record of the empire, I remember reading of the expulsion of the Jews from Rome during that time.

My lord, I offer up my findings from the words of Suetonius for your discernment.

TO OVIDIUS

Augustus 18, consulate of Caesar C. Valerius Licinianus Licinius Augustus^{li}

Third letter of Emperor Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus, to Ovidius

Quinctilius Calvus, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium.

My dear Ovidius, I must commend you, as your letters continue to increase in both interest and importance to your quest.

PLINY THE YOUNGER:

As I begin this letter, first I must address your curious account of the esteemed Pliny the Younger. I find it of much interest that a document was published enclosing the names of Christians, yet even more curious is the specific mention that it was published anonymously. It appears that there were some loyal Romans fighting against the spread of this new cult, yet they refused to accept responsibility for their manuscript. Dear Ovidius, a man would presumably be rewarded for information about these Christians. Were the Roman citizens scared of this new religious sect? Could the rapid spreading of this cult have been intimidating the dutiful Romans who remain devoted to the standing Caesar? I have never witnessed a cult that, while dutifully peaceful and passive in creed, is still threatening to the masses.

Furthermore, I must point out that Pliny the Younger seemed to believe that it was possible to rehabilitate the foolish Roman citizens who had adhered to this new religion. Instead of executing them along with the rest of those who professed to be Christians, he appears to have sent them back to Rome in hopes of transmitting their allegiance away from their Christ and back to the Emperor. Christianity seems to have been spreading like a wildfire during the time of Pliny the Younger, and there appears to have been no restrictions as to who may enter this cult.

Women and children, of course, could be expected to follow this Christ, but, according to Pliny, educated men of high standings were falling to Christianity as well. However, there seemed to be some success in the rehabilitation of the Roman citizens who once called themselves followers of this Christ. It was noticed that the traditional religious acts of Rome were again being fulfilled. Pliny himself said that "it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is afforded."^{lii} While there were many of those who still called themselves Christians causing trouble in Rome and the provinces, it appears that for many the preservation of life was more important than the preservation of a new religion, for even stronger than the need for repentance is the human instinct of survival. Pliny seems to be making a subtle hint to the Emperor Trajan that if the Christians were to be forced under pressure and greatly threatened by execution, then many would recant of their blasphemy against the Caesar. The only complication to this scheme of Pliny's is that Christianity continues to exist and is still growing today. Despite the many persecutions and executions that the Christians faced, this mysterious cult continues to flourish in Rome and beyond.

Dear Ovidius, I agree with your sentiment about the harsh and mocking treatment of the Christians and I also sympathize with their plight, yet I do not understand the meaning and curious dedication of their devotion to their Christ. These Christians, these mysteriously moral people who I cannot pretend to understand, are an absolute anomaly. They are being killed for their profession of faith in this man they call Christ, for what idea or teaching can make an educated man feel so strongly about a cause that he would be willing to throw his life away? It takes only a few words to be forgiven for their infraction of devotion, yet they seem loath to do even an act so simple. The faith of the Christians in their Christ unnerves even me, so much that I admit that I fear that these Christians have begun something that may create trouble for Rome.

Once a man no longer fears for his life, there can be no stopping him from fulfilling his mission. If these people, who have in a short time grown so numerous and strong, are so committed to the cause of their Christ that they are willing to be executed in this man's name, then I fear there is no cause in the world that can stop the spread of so many people to this new religion. Dear Ovidius, now all that is left is to decide if Rome should align with these people or banish their religion from the Empire, for if the situation is to be remained unchecked, then the very foundations of Rome could be shaken by this curious cult.

SUETONIUS:

Next, according to the writing of Suetonius presented to me, it appears that at this time the Romans had seen the new cult of Christians as not necessarily a separate people with their own religion and creed, but as a new, extraneous sect of Judaism. The spread of the Christians into Rome and their new teachings from their Christ caused conflicts between the cult and the Romans.^{liii} It is said that Claudius Caesar expelled the Jews and their Christian sect from Rome in order to mend the conflicts brewing between the Jews and Romans and not by reasons of discrimination against the Jews. Curiously enough, this expulsion of the Jews corresponds directly to a passage in one of the holy books of the Christians. This passage of the Christians states, "After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome."^{liv} The direct connection between the accounts of the Christians and the account of Suetonius appear to validate the words of Suetonius in regards to the Christians.

Dear Ovidius, I must mention to you that I have noticed a sort of trend that has appeared in the past several reports you have delivered unto me. Almost all of the accounts of these men

of old have described the curious religion of the Christians as a "superstition." Both of the previous two accounts mentioned, those of Pliny the Younger and Suetonius, as well as Tacitus, specifically mention the word "superstition" in regards to their description of Christians and the teachings of their Christ. This discovery sheds a new light as to how the Christians were commonly seen by a majority of the people of Rome if the description was prominent enough to be mentioned by three distinct men in their reference to Christianity. During the time that these men were writing, it appears that the word "superstition" meant solely that the customs of the Christians, and the larger religion of Judaism, were unfamiliar, or more likely distasteful, to the inhabitants of Rome. It was these numerous customs and beliefs that separated the Jews and Christians from Romans, ideas that the Jews seemed to emphasize, as if placing a wall between them and us of Rome.^{lv} I know that the Jews are a people very proud of their heritage, and they tend to keep their own traditional customs to make themselves exclusive and to disassociate their religion from that of Rome, instead of assimilating into the Roman culture as has happened with most other peoples who have been taken under the mighty Empire of Rome. The Jews would tell our own stories with their singular, monotheistic god at the center, and they did all that they could within the confines of Rome to distinguish themselves as a sovereign nation despite their inclusion into the empire of Rome. The fact that as many as three men mentioned the word "superstition" merely reflects the view of the Romans during the time and the fact that the Jews, and by extension the Christians, refused to immerse themselves into the culture of Rome.

My dear Ovidius, each day I eagerly await your next report, for this challenge bestowed upon you has returned many a reward. Continue your journey, and send your letters to Rome as soon as you are able, my old friend.

TO CONSTANTINE

LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA

Inaurius 5, consulate of Caesar C. Valerius Licinianus Licinius Augustus^{lvi}

Sixth letter of Ovidius, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium, and Ovidius, scriba, to our lord,

Imperator Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus

Dear Emperor, you probably have heard of our next study, that of the famous satirist Lucian of Samosata. This cynic was born in Samosata, Syria, where he learned Greek and began his first career as a rhetorician. The skeptic abandoned his first calling to compose dialogue, with which he used to satirize all religions of the time, poking fun especially at the philosophers and the "wise men" of the age. The reference we are most interested in is found in his work "Peregrine" in which he describes a Cynic philosopher who was enticed by the lure of Christianity.^{lvii}

Of "Peregrine" Lucian writes,

It was then that he learned the wondrous lore of the Christians, by associating with their priests and scribes in Palestine. And—how else could it be? —in a trice he made them all look like children, for he was prophet, cult-leader, head of the synagogue, and everything, all by himself. He interpreted and explained some of their books and even composed many, and they revered him as a god, made use of him as a lawgiver, and set him down as a protector, next after that other, to be sure, whom they still worship, the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world."^{lviii}

“Indeed, people came even from the cities in Asia, sent by the Christians at their common expense, to succour and defend and encourage the hero. They show incredible speed whenever any such public action is taken; for in no time they lavish their all. So it was then in the case of Peregrinus; much money came to him from them by reason of his imprisonment, and he procured not a little revenue from it. The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody; most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once, for all by denying the Greek

gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws. Therefore they despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property, receiving such doctrines traditionally without any definite evidence. So if any charlatan and trickster, able to profit by occasions, comes among them, he quickly acquires sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk.^{lix}

The famed rhetorician Lucian, my lord, gives much information about the early Christians and their teachings in his satirical work "Peregrine." In his manuscript, Lucian describes the man they call Christ. He states that this man was crucified in Palestine as a result of his teachings that were unfavorable to the Jews and Romans.^{lx} Concerning Jesus himself, Lucian describes this Christ as the figurehead and leader of this new cult of Christianity. This man was a lawgiver and a prophet, though it is unclear from where he received his prophetic powers.^{lxi} The laws of Jesus of Nazareth were given to his faithful Christians to follow in the teachings that he presented to them while he was still alive.

Not only does Lucian mention the man, but he mentions the followers as well. It is said that during this time the Christians came from as far away as Asia to proclaim their constant belief that this man they call Jesus was the true Christ they had been waiting for. Concerning the teachings of Christians as given by their Christ, Lucian writes that the doctrines included the absurd and mysterious ideas that Christians believe they are going to live forever, that they have now formed what sounds like blood relations as they enter this cult, as they say that they are all brothers and sisters in their new religion, that they must deny both our gods and the divinity of Caesar and worship none other than their Christ, and that they must disregard all of their material possessions.^{lxii} My lord, most of the doctrines of the Christians can be dismissed as a mere superstition and left alone for the people to make fools of themselves with their religious rites, but they commit blasphemy by placing worship of their Christ above their worship and devotion to the Emperor. According to the words of Lucian, the educated public see these Christians as simple and uneducated, yet many of them continue to be persecuted and imprisoned for their

creed.

My lord, Lucian describes these Christians as dimwitted fools, but the ranks of the followers of the man they call Jesus have grown to include educated men and women of great standing in the everlasting empire of Rome. The attraction that Christianity has for the people is mysterious, as despite being mocked, ridiculed, imprisoned, and punished, their cult continues to grow. Furthermore, I must ask, if Lucian is writing in jest, can there be any assurance of truth to his words? As a satirist, he mockingly exaggerates the truth, but could he have exaggerated so much so that the truth is unknowable?

Emperor Constantine, I send this report to you for your discernment of the words of Lucian of Samosata, the satirist of the second century.

TO CONSTANTINE

MARA BAR SERAPION

December 24, consulate of Caesar Fl. Valerius Constantinus Augustus II^{lxiii}

Seventh letter of Ovidius, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium, and Ovidius, *scriba*, to my lord,

Imperator Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus

My next source, noble Emperor, is one of a fascinating origin. It is a single letter written by a man with the name of Mara, son of Serapion. Mara bar-Serapion wrote his letter to his son, who is also named Serapion, sometime after the year of the consulate of Caesar Domitianus II and Valerius Catullus Messallinus.^{lxiv} The letter discusses events similar to the Second Jewish Revolt, placing the date of origin in the second century.^{lxv}

In his letter to his son, Mara writes,

What else can we say, when the wise are forcibly dragged off by tyrants, their wisdom is captured by insults, and their minds are oppressed and without defense? What advantage did the Athenians gain by murdering Socrates, for which they were repaid with famine and pestilence? Or the people of Samos by the burning of Pythagoras, because their country was completely covered in sand in just one hour? Or the Jews by killing their wise king, because their kingdom was taken away at that very time? God justly repaid the wisdom of these three men: the Athenians died of famine; the Samians were completely overwhelmed by the sea; and the Jews, desolate and driven from their own kingdom, are scattered through every nation. Socrates is not dead, because of Plato; neither is Pythagoras, because of the statue of Juno; nor is the wise king, because of the new laws he laid down.^{lxvi}

Emperor Constantine, next I present to you a letter written by the hand of one Mara, son of Serapion. In his correspondence with his son of the same name, Mara Bar Serapion wrote about the man he refers to as the "Wise King" of the Jews in conjunction with the famed Socrates and Pythagoras. According to this manuscript, the Wise King was murdered by the Jews because of his great intelligence and wisdom.^{lxvii} My lord, because Mara appears to have spoken very

highly of this man he calls the Jewish King, he must have received his information from a Christian source. Mara believes that the Jewish Christ was callously murdered by his own people, similar to the enlightened Socrates and Pythagoras. According to his writings, Mara must have had knowledge of the trial of the Christ and known that it was the Jews who turned the man over to Pontius Pilate to be crucified. He also uses the title of King to describe this man we can only assume to be the Christ referred to by the Christians. Mara Bar Serapion makes the astounding claim that this Jewish King did not completely die when he was placed in the tomb but continues to live through his teachings, as do Socrates and Pythagoras. My lord, if the fame of Socrates and Pythagoras has yet to diminish, then will this Christ live on in memory as well? In a thousand years will this man and his teaching be remembered?

Socrates and Pythagoras were two of the greatest minds to walk this earth, yet Mara is comparing the leader of this new cult to old wise men. Every educated man, woman, and child is familiar with the teachings of Socrates through his student Plato. Even dull villagers know the name of Pythagoras. What right does Mara have to compare this Jewish King to those men? My lord, it is with the upmost certainty that Mara Bar Serapion believes this man to be great, to outlive his earthly body by his teachings given to his faithful few.

TO OVIDIUS

Maius 24, consulate of M. Aurelius Calerius Maxentius Augustus III and Pompeius Probus^{lxviii}

Fourth letter of Emperor Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus, to Ovidius

Quinctilius Calvus, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium.

Peace be to you, my dear Ovidius. I have just finished reading your two new reports of the satirist Lucian of Samosata and the letter of Mara Bar Serapion, and as follows I present my analysis of the words written by these two men.

LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA:

I must say that I have a great interest in the works of the satirist Lucian because of the style in which he describes the Christians. In response to your question, Ovidius, I believe that this satirical account can still be taken as truth because of the very nature of satire itself, for Lucian did not write as if telling a fantastical tale, but rather he wrote as mocking the beliefs of the Christians. According to my study, it is common of Satirists to take the familiar views of the people concerning a certain truth and produce a mocking work that criticizes one such truth, yet this stands to reason that in every exaggeration there is but a grain of truth. Lucian of Samosata was not writing mere fiction but was taking a real subject and presenting it to the reader in a humorous and inflated fashion to make a statement, one concerning the cult of Christianity, to his audience at the time.

Now, in response to the actual words of Lucian, I find the doctrines of the Christians that he mentioned to be quite curious, for while previous reports from other sources had mentioned only the standard moral laws of the cult, the writings of Lucian describe what seem to be the deeper doctrines that were taught to the Christians by their leader, Jesus of Nazareth. As to the

belief that these Christians are immortal, it appears similar to the immortality the Christians ascribe to Jesus himself, that, like their leader, his followers will also rise after death, yet a further mention of this resurrection doctrine is currently not known. However, let me present to you a slight insight, Ovidius, for it appears that resurrection is a reoccurring theme in Christianity, a core belief of the cult. As to other central creeds of the religion, when the same statements are written by multiple authors of different locations and times, I am more inclined to take such information as truth, and similarly to Pliny the Younger, whom we have already researched in our previous exchange, Lucian also states that the true Christians only accept the divinity of their Christ and not that of the Caesar. This doctrine has not been compromised by time; therefore, I believe that this must be a core law of the Christian creed as well, in addition to their curious belief in the resurrection of the dead.

MARA BAR SERAPION:

Now, I must turn my attention to the writings of the singular Mara Bar Serapion. My dear Ovidius, despite the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is not actually mentioned by specific name, I must conclude that the Christ of the Christians is the only accurate person that would fit the description of the "wise king" of Mara Bar Serapion. The fact that he is not mentioned by name could allude to one of two ideas: first, that the fame of Jesus of Nazareth was so well known by the time Mara wrote his letter that he deemed it unnecessary to write the name explicitly, or, because the title Mara bestowed upon the man, that of a "wise king of the Jews," was in fact specific only to Jesus and would not and could not be properly attributed to any other man. Curiously, the title "king of the Jews" was not a commonly used title during the time of the writings of Mara Bar Serapion, yet it is in direct relation to the title given to Jesus of Nazareth as found in the Gospel of Mark, one of the books of the Christians. The passage from the Gospel of

Mark states concerning the crucifixion of Jesus, "And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.'"^{lxi} This direct allusion to Jesus of Nazareth only continues to support my conclusion that it was in fact the leader of the Christians who is referred to in the letter of Mara Bar Serapion.

Furthermore, the writings of Mara Bar Serapion seem to align well with the words of the Christians. Mara tells in his letter that "the Jews, desolate and driven from their own kingdom, are scattered through every nation."^{lxx} This, similar to the title "King of the Jews," also appears to have been supported by the holy books of the Christians, in again the Gospel attributed to the man Mark, for Mark writes the words of Jesus himself when he describes the destruction of the temple, "And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!' And Jesus said to him, 'Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.'"^{lxxi} These verses from the holy books of the Christians are interesting in our study because they so closely align with the words of these sources of Greek and Roman origin, for in reference to the letter of Mara Bar Serapion, the destruction of the temple was the completely destruction not only of a building, but of the entire house of worship of the people of Judaism and with the ruin of the temple, the Jews were forced to leave the city and scatter elsewhere in search of safety and shelter. Already much has been discovered in common between Mara Bar Serapion and the teachings of the Christians, so much so that I must conclude that it is clear Mara Bar Serapion must have received his information about the followers of Jesus of Nazareth from the Christians themselves.

Despite his Christian source of information, I find it interesting that for a pronounced stoic writer, Mara seems to have such a positive disposition towards the Christians, yet upon our

analysis, the letter does not appear to be an endorsement of Christianity in the slightest manner. You may take notice, dear Ovidius, that Mara Bar Serapion is not in his letter attempting to persuade his son to follow Christianity, but merely is attempting to teach his son to recognize and praise the wisdom of the three men he mentions in his curious letter. As for the references to Jesus himself, Mara Bar Serapion is not in fact putting him in a higher regard than Socrates or Pythagoras, as a Christian most certainly would have at the time when he was writing, therefore, I must still accept the words of Mara Bar Serapion as those from a non-Christian writer who assumedly received his sources from Christians because, while Mara's sources would have obviously tended towards a favorable view of Jesus of Nazareth, it was the choice of Mara alone to put Jesus in as high a regard as he places the famed Socrates and esteemed Pythagoras. I find it most interesting that he went as far as to place Jesus of Nazareth, this man who is head of a new religious movement, with such men as Socrates and Pythagoras, who are known across the Empire as two of the most intelligent men known to history due to their great knowledge and wisdom in such matters, from this I must conclude that Jesus of Nazareth, even during the time of Mara Bar Serapion, was a man well known for his immense wisdom and teachings.

Dear Ovidius, I must continue to say that I am well pleased with your reports, and I wait in eager anticipation for your next letters. The battles of the Empire have become no less fierce with time, and I worry that this danger will not end until I defeat Maxentius, yet despite the battles between our forces and those of the enemy, I retain hope that our troops will soon regain victory. Remain safe on your journey, but I must ask of you that you not delay in your quest for knowledge. Our time may be cut short, esteemed Ovidius, due to these troubles of war, and I believe that in the coming time the information you provide to me and the sources of these venerated writers will prove invaluable as to the future of Rome.

TO CONSTANTINE

PHLEGON OF TRALLES

December 17, consulate of M. Aurelius Calerius Maxentius Augustus III and Pompeius Probus^{lxxii}

Eighth letter of Ovidius, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium, and Seneca, *scriba*, to my lord, Emperor Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus

Next, my lord, we have the Greek writer Phlegon, who was born during the consulate of Titus Caesar Vespasianus Augustus VIII and Ceasar Domitianus VII and was most likely a freedman of Emperor Hadrian.^{lxxiii} We cannot find his most famous original writing, a work he titled *Chronicles*, and only a few of the works of historians of which I have access have quoted him directly. Of these few writers I was able to discover the works of Origen, Eusebius,^{lxxiv} and Julius Africanus.

In accordance with the power of the man Jesus, it is written by Origen of Phlegon,

Now Phlegon, in the thirteenth or fourteenth book, I think, of his *Chronicles*, not only ascribed to Jesus a knowledge of future events (although falling into confusion about some things which refer to Peter, as if they referred to Jesus), but also testified that the result corresponded to His predictions. So that he also, by these very admissions regarding foreknowledge, as if against his will, expressed his opinion that the doctrines taught by the fathers of our system were not devoid of divine power.^{lxxv}

Of his resurrected body, Phlegon reports,

The testimony of Phlegon, who relates that these events took place at the time when our Saviour suffered. And he goes on to say, "Jesus, while alive, was of no assistance to himself, but that he arose after death, and exhibited the marks of his punishment, and showed how his hands had been pierced by nails."^{lxxvi}

Furthermore, of the eclipse that was said to have occurred at the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, it is said that,

Phlegon records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth—manifestly that one of which we speak. But what has an eclipse in common with an earthquake, the rending rocks, and the resurrection of the dead, and so great a perturbation throughout the universe? Surely no such event as this is recorded for a long period. But it was a darkness induced by God, because the Lord happened then to suffer. And calculation makes out that the period of 70 weeks, as noted in Daniel, is completed at this time.^{lxxvii}

Eusebius's *Chronicle* writes that,

Jesus Christ, in accordance with the prophecies which were spoken about him, went to his passion in the 18th year of Tiberius, and we have found the following things written about this year in the histories of the gentiles: there was an eclipse of the sun, Bithynia was devastated by an earthquake, and many buildings in the city of Nicaea were destroyed. All this coincides with the events of the passion of our Saviour. Phlegon, in the 13th book of his admirable account of the Olympiads, writes about this as follows: "In the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad, there was an eclipse of the sun, greater than any which had occurred previously. At the sixth hour, the day became as dark as night, and the stars were visible in the sky. An earthquake in Bithynia destroyed many buildings in Nicaea."^{lxxviii}

Furthermore, on the topic of the crucifixion of Jesus, it is written, "And with regard to the eclipse in the time of Tiberius Caesar, in whose reign Jesus appears to have been crucified, and the great earthquakes which then took place, Phlegon too, I think, has written in the thirteenth or fourteenth book of his *Chronicles*."^{lxxix}

Before I mention the multiple accounts of the darkness and eclipse, I will address the first two quotes from Phlegon concerning the attributes of Jesus of Nazareth. We can learn from the first passage that Phlegon calls the man a prophet whose predictions actually came to fruition.^{lxxx} If this man had the ability to predict the future, he had been given a gift from the gods. Prophets are men chosen by the gods to work among those of us here on earth, so was this man a messenger of the gods? And, if so, then of what god, for the Christians proclaim the idea of a single god and refuse to accept the divinity of either our own gods or of the Caesar? Despite my

confusion, what we can learn from Phlegon is that this man Jesus was able to foretell the future. While it can be argued that this passage is made of lies woven by the Christians, as Origen was a prominent Christian writer, I see no fault in the passage that would make me question the authenticity of the work. Of interest to me are the words "as if against his will,"^{lxxxix} which I find intriguing because they recognize Phlegon's status as a nonbeliever. This seems to me to say that even though Phlegon was not a Christian, he still recognized the fact that, for whatever unknown reason, Jesus of Nazareth had supernatural powers. Furthermore, it is discussed in the second quote from Phlegon of Tralles that Jesus came back to life after he was executed on the cross, and in his resurrected state was able to even show people where the nails of the cross pierced his hands.^{lxxxii}

While the loss of the original words of Phlegon is ill fated, the quotes attributed to the man give great insight as to the darkness of the crucifixion of Jesus. In response to the words concerning the darkness and eclipse, it seems to me that the details used by Phlegon relate directly to those of the Christians. It is also interesting to note that Phlegon did not mention the name of Jesus during his writings. If anything, my lord, I believe that this fact gives weight to the accuracy of Phlegon's account. As we have already discussed briefly, he was obviously not a Christian himself nor was promoting Christianity in any sense, but was merely stating the event as fact, erasing all doubts that Christians may have changed the document at a later time. In fact, there is no question according to Phlegon as to whether or not the eclipse happened, but of how it possibly could have occurred. He was trying to rationalize the event, not prove that it was a false account. Phlegon's detailed work also included the emperor at the time, Emperor Hadrian, as well as the time of the darkness and earthquake that shook the land. The specificity of this

information leads me to believe that this darkness did in fact occur at the time mentioned.

May you gain great victory in battle, my lord Emperor Constantine.

TO OVIDIUS

Quintilis 12, consulate of Caesar C. Galerius Valerius Maximianus VIII and Caesar Galerius

Valerius Maximianus Augustus II^{lxxxiii}

Fifth letter of Imperator Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus, to Ovidius Quinctilius Calvus, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium.

My dear Ovidius, I must be brief in this letter, for many troubles have been plaguing the empire and it seems that they will not cease with time. I write this letter to inform you that I will be rendered unable to respond to your letters in the coming months, but, nevertheless, remember always that I have not forgotten about your undertaking of this noble quest and I ask that despite my lack of a response in the coming months, for you to please continue to send me your updates as you have previously done so, and the next time that you receive a letter from me, I will have defeated Maxentius in battle. Peace and safe travels.

TO CONSTANTINE

THALLUS

Mercedonius 9, consulate of Caesar C. Valerius Licinianus Licinius Augustus II, Caesar M.

Aurelius Valerius Maxentius Augustus IV, and Caesar Flavius Valerius Constantinus

Augustus^{lxxxiv}

Ninth letter of Ovidius, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium, and Seneca, *scriba*, to my lord,

Imperator Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus

Noble Emperor, the next case study is that of the well-known Samaritan historian Thallus. In all my travels around the east Mediterranean, I could not find Thallus's original source, his work which was compiled about the consulate of Faustus Cornelius Sulla Felix and Salvius Otho Titianus^{lxxxv} and relates the history from the Trojan War to the time of his life in the first century. Even though I was unable to find his original work, I discovered references to this man in the passages of the Christian Julius Africanus, who wrote of Christianity in the third century. Africanus briefly discussed the quotation from Thallus concerning the darkness that the Christians claim occurred during the crucifixion of the Christ. However, he attributed this phenomenon to an eclipse, not a supernatural act as the Christians declare.^{lxxxvi}

Julius Africanus writes that,

This event followed each of his deeds, and healings of body and soul, and knowledge of hidden things, and his resurrection from the dead, all sufficiently proven to the disciples before us and to his apostles: after the most dreadful darkness fell over the whole world, the rocks were torn apart by an earthquake and much of Judaea and the rest of the land was torn down. Thallus calls this darkness an eclipse of the sun in the third book of his Histories, without reason it seems to me. For the Hebrews celebrate the Passover on the 14th day, reckoning by the lunar calendar, and the events concerning the savior all occurred before the first day of the Passover. But an eclipse of the sun happens when the moon creeps under the sun, and this is impossible at any other time but between the first day of the moon's waxing and the day before that, when the new moon begins.^{lxxxvii}

My lord, of the importance of the text written by Thallus, this man wrote soon after the death of Jesus of Nazareth and is actually our earliest reference to date of the man. Thallus states that he observed an eclipse of the sun that cast a great darkness upon the land and attributed the darkness to an eclipse, which in my opinion seems to be an improbable cause of the darkness. Based on the teachings of the Jews and the astronomical calendar they follow, it is actually impossible that a natural eclipse could have occurred during that time because it is written that the Christ was crucified one day before Passover, when the moon was at its fullest point. A solar eclipse can only occur when the moon is at the end of the cycle and is completely dark; therefore, it is unfeasible that such darkness could have transpired at the time it is recorded unless it was by means of a supernatural act.

I offer up this brief report to your analysis, my lord Constantine, and wish for you strength and victory in battle.

TO OVIDIUS

November 24, consulate of Caesar C. Valerius Licinianus Licinius Augustus II, Caesar M.

Aurelius Valerius Maxentius Augustus IV, and Caesar Flavius Valerius Constantinus

Augustus^{lxxxviii}

Sixth letter of Imperator Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus, to Ovidius

Quinctilius Caldus, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium.

My dear Ovidius, thank you both for your continuation of your quest despite the battles that rage in the Empire and for your two most recent sources, that of Thallus and of Phlegon of Tralles. I must say that the similarities between the works of the two men is astonishing, as both reference the event of the darkness and earthquake that is said by the Christians to have occurred at the time of the death of Jesus of Nazareth, therefore, I will analyze the words of these two men simultaneously, instead of individually as I have been in my past letters.

Upon reading the curious words of both Thallus and Phlegon, I am intrigued to notice first that neither man attempts to prove the actual occurrence of the event, for it is as if the event was such a prominent incident in history that there must have been no question of its existence at some point in time. Instead, both men attempt to rationalize the incident, as if they and those they are writing to have already accepted the event itself as an indisputable fact. Now, as you have already mentioned, Ovidius, and I must say that I agree with your statement, it appears that neither Phlegon nor Thallus were Christians themselves, as can be easily proven by the words in the passages you have presented to me. Therefore, it is a reasonable statement to assume that the men would attempt to rationalize what they have recorded, for no Christian would ever deny a spiritual explanation by endeavoring to come to a natural conclusion of the events that have taken place. As it would be, there appears to be no solid explanation for the darkness and eclipse

unless it occurred by means of a supernatural event, as it is said by the Christians, for as you have written, it is said that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified on the eve of Passover, and as Passover is the day of the full moon, it is illogical for an eclipse to occur at such a time.

Now, as it happens, the original words of these men are no longer preserved, and I must be cautious in determining the authenticity of the accounts of these men, as they were quoted later by Christian writers. However, by the nature of the quotations, I can find no reason for the later Christians to change what was previously written because neither man changed the words of Thallus and Phlegon to refer the darkness specifically to Jesus. It is the Christian writers who make the connection themselves, but, either way, they appear to have used the words of nonbiased writers to add support and reason to their claim of the curious darkness, for the words of Thallus and Phlegon did not mention Jesus, and seems that it was never their intention to write about a new religious leader, but in fact they were writing history, and as both were famed historians, I feel confident as to the validity of the occurrence of the darkness and eclipse. The fact that it is surprisingly similar to what is said in the holy books of the Christians I believe strengthens the notion that this event did occur. One of the books of the Christians that I have mentioned previously in our exchange of letters is the account by an author called Mark, who writes, "And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour."^{lxxxix} This verse correlates exactly with the words of Thallus and Phlegon of Tralles, and so, Ovidius, I must thank you for providing me with one more piece of the puzzle of Christianity. Through the words of Phlegon of Tralles and Thallus, I am confident of one of the incidents the Christians claim to have occurred, for despite the astrological evidence to the contrary of this incident, due to the verification provided in the sources of the two men it appears that this eclipse must have occurred, be it may by supernatural or natural means.

My dear Ovidius, you must have noticed a slight change in the disposition of my writing of this letter, as I must appear to you to be more sympathetic towards the Christians than I had been of late in our previous letters, for I have recently witnessed the glory of the Christ, and I will offer you a brief description of my vision. On day 27 of the month of October, I had a vision of the Cross of Jesus Christ, a glorious image I retain vividly in my memory^{xc} for at midday I saw a most marvelous sign break across the heavens, a sign of the cross of light proclaiming the message, "Conquer by this."^{xc} I was so astounded by this curious vision, so much so that my army and I were shaking in amazement of this wonderful image presented before us in the heavens, high above the sun, yet despite my wonder at the vision, I was still undecided as to the meaning of such an image. However, that night, in my sleep the Christ appeared before me, the very Christ Jesus of Nazareth of whom the Christians follow, next to the sign of the cross of light I had seen earlier in that same day with my men. Christ required me to fashion a cross of the same likelihood to use in battle as a safeguard from my enemies^{xcii} and I immediately sent for those men known for their faith in the god of the Christians and professed to them the visions that had appeared to me in my sleep that night. It was these holy men who confirmed my judgment that it was Christ who presented these visions to me, and I became convinced of the power of the god of the Christians.^{xciii} The next morning, I shared my dream of wonder with my men and called them to make the representation of the cross in precious stones, in which a spear overlaid with gold formed the cross with a second bar crossing the spear. I then had my men place a wreath including the name of Christ, the symbols chi and rho, at the head of the cross. The cross and wreath were attached to a beautiful royal cloth to form a banner with which we could conquer the forces of Maxentius. This sign was replicated for the heads of all the armies, as it was foretold that it would safeguard my men from harm in battle and^{xciv} it was by this vision

that I received victory in my battle against Maxentius, whose forces greatly outnumbered my own, and it is by this vision that Rome will conquer.

Thank you, dear Ovidius, for your service, as I was accurate in my previous letter to you that the sources you present to me have now become more important than ever. I urge you to continue your research, as I want to know everything about Christianity, for now I have seen Christ.

TO CONSTANTINE

CELSUS

December 17, consulate of Caesar C. Valerius Licinianus Licinius Augustus II, Caesar M.

Aurelius Valerius Maxentius Augustus IV, and Caesar Flavius Valerius Constantinus

Augustus^{xcv}

Tenth letter of Ovidius, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium, and Ovidius, *scriba*, to the esteemed
Imperator Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus

Emperor Constantine, most beloved of the gods, I rejoice in your astonishing discovery!
The news of your vision has reached the nations, and I celebrate with those loyal to you both
because of your immense victory over Maxentius and your vision of salvation. I resume my task
with more enthusiasm and zeal than ever before, my lord, that I may provide you with the
information you so desire.

Emperor Constantine, to begin my next letter we have yet another lost source. We cannot
find the works of the Platonic philosopher Celsus, who composed *The True Word* in the second
century. Our only evidence of this work is found in the quotations and citations of the Christian
Church Father Origen, who wrote his book *Contra Celsum* at the consulate of Imperator Caesar
M. Iulius Philippus Augustus III and Imperator Caesar M. Iulius Severus Philippus Augustus
II.^{x cvi} Celsus was one of the first hard critics of this new religion, and his attack on Christianity
was strong enough to have caught the attention of a church father.^{x cvii}

Origen wrote much about the words of Celsus, and as follows are the most prominent
references,

And in the first place, he [Celsus] accuses Him [Jesus of Nazareth] of having "invented
his birth from a virgin," and upbraids Him with being "born in a certain Jewish village, of

a poor woman of the country, who gained her subsistence by spinning, and who was turned out of doors by her husband, a carpenter by trade, because she was convicted of adultery; that after being driven away by her husband, and wandering about for a time, she disgracefully gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate child, who having hired himself out as a servant in Egypt on account of his poverty, and having there acquired some miraculous powers, on which the Egyptians greatly pride themselves, returned to his own country, highly elated on account of them, and by means of these proclaimed himself a God.^{"xcviii}

Furthermore, Celsus states, in another statement, that it is

only foolish and low individuals, and persons devoid of perception, and slaves, and women, and children, of whom the teachers of the divine word wish to make converts. . . For why is it an evil to have been educated, and to have studied the best opinions, and to have both the reality and appearance of wisdom? What hindrance does this offer to the knowledge of God? Why should it not rather be an assistance, and a means by which one might be better able to arrive at the truth?^{?xcix}

A third reference Origen quotes from Celsus,

"And again," he [Celsus] says, "let us resume the subject from the beginning, with a larger array of proofs. And I make no new statement, but say what has been long settled. God is good, and beautiful, and blessed, and that in the best and most beautiful degree. But if he come down among men, he must undergo a change, and a change from good to evil, from virtue to vice, from happiness to misery, and from best to worst. Who, then, would make choice of such a change? It is the nature of a mortal, indeed, to undergo change and remoulding, but of an immortal to remain the same and unaltered. God, then, could not admit of such a change."^c

Celsus next makes certain observations of the following nature:

Again, if God, like Jupiter in the comedy, should, on awaking from a lengthened slumber, desire to rescue the human race from evil, why did He send this Spirit of which you speak into one corner (of the earth)? He ought to have breathed it alike into many bodies, and have sent them out into all the world. Now the comic poet, to cause laughter in the theatre, wrote that Jupiter, after awakening, dispatched Mercury to the Athenians and Lacedaemonians; but do not you think that you have made the Son of God more ridiculous in sending Him to the Jews?^{ci}

Finally, of Jesus Celsus states, "But let us now return to where the Jew is introduced, speaking of the mother of Jesus, and saying that 'when she was pregnant she was turned out of doors by the carpenter to whom she had been betrothed, as having been guilty of adultery, and

that she bore a child to a certain soldier named Panthera.^{70cii}

My lord Emperor Constantine, the writings of Celsus accuse these Christians and the Christ of many things. He wrote enough about the early Christians that a church father felt the need to take notice of him, so this is proof in itself that Celsus's words are not the mere raving of a madman. More likely, this is what the Jews and Greeks had been saying about the Christians all along, but only Celsus was confident enough to write so much about the teachings of these men.

Of their Christ, Celsus argues against many of the traditional stories the Christians believe are truth. For example, Celsus disputes the fact that their Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, was born of a virgin, claiming instead that he was born in a Jewish village to a poor woman. This woman, assumed to be Mary, the mother of Jesus, was banished from her home by her husband because she had committed adultery against him and against their god. Celsus argues that Jesus was not born unto a virgin due to supernatural occurrences but to an adulteress. He further relates that Mary bore a child to a soldier named Panthera, who seems to have left Mary without aid. As a result of the illegitimacy of Christ's birth and the poverty he grew up in, he became a servant in Egypt, where he gained miraculous power. Emperor Constantine, we know how the Egyptians take pride in their "supernatural" powers that they say come from their gods. However, once this illegitimate Christ returned to his homeland after his duration in Egypt, he continued to have these powers he acquired in Egypt and proclaimed himself to be a god.

Celsus is critical of the Christians for many things, my lord. For example, Celsus teaches that only foolish people, such as women, servants, and children, are converts and that Christianity is a religion for the unskilled and uneducated. In fact, Celsus states that it is even considered evil by the Christians to be educated in the first place, as if it would open their minds

to the lies of Christianity.

Furthermore, Celsus attacks even the god of the Christians, saying that it is impossible for a god to come to earth in the way he supposedly did. Celsus writes in this way, that if the god of the Christians was truly good, beautiful, noble, and right in the highest way as a deity, then their god must have changed in some way when he became human on earth. Instead of being good, he was evil, instead of being right in all circumstances, he was wrong, and so on. If this god of the Christians truly is immortal, then what in the universe could convince him to change into a wicked human? Moreover, their god chose to only save a small corner of the human race from evil. How is it just that when an infinitely good being has the power to save humanity, he chooses to save only the Jews? I cannot argue with Celsus that it seems to be better for the entire human race to be granted the coveted salvation as promised by the Christians instead of only a small portion of humanity, leaving the rest of us to die in evil.

Emperor Constantine, I leave these troubling words of Celsus in your hands, that your new salvation may provide a better understanding of the life of Jesus of Nazareth than I could offer up to you at this time.

TO CONSTANTINE

THE TALMUD

December 30, consulate of Caesar C. Valerius Licinianus Licinius Augustus II, Caesar M.

Aurelius Valerius Maxentius Augustus IV, and Caesar Flavius Valerius Constantinus Augustus^{ciii}

Eleventh letter of Ovidius, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium, and Ovidius, *scriba*, to the esteemed
Imperator Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus

My lord Emperor Constantine, what may very well be my final report is not one concerning a single man, but of a collection of Jewish teachings passed down through generations. The teachings of the Jews are compiled not only in writing but in oral tradition, and during my travels I have had the opportunity to hear much of what the Jews are teaching about Christianity and Jesus of Nazareth.^{civ} As a Jewish source, I have found that these men are obviously very opposed to the teachings of Jesus, making for an interesting account that is similar to that of Celsus.

The first reference to Jesus from the Talmud is that of his crucifixion,

"On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!"^{cv}

Next, in relation to the mother of Jesus it is said that "She who was the descendant of princes and governors, played the harlot with carpenters."^{cvi}

Also of the mother of Jesus, "And this they did to Ben Stada and they hung him on the eve of Passover. Ben Stada was Ben Padira. R. Hisda said: 'The husband was Stada, the paramour Padira. But was not the husband Pappos b. Judah? — His mother's name was Stada.

But his mother was Miriam, a dresser of woman's hair? This woman has turned away from her husband."^{cvi}

From these passages orally passed down by the Jews we can identify that Jesus of Nazareth was killed, yet in this work it tells that he was executed by means of hanging, not crucifixion as it is recorded by the Christians. Also, from these teachings we can confirm that Jesus was executed the day before Passover and for the first time we have an account that states that a herald publically announced the death of Jesus days before his actual execution. The leader of the Christians was accused of sorcery, which accounts for the miracles he is said to have performed during his life, and it also describes how no man stopped the death of Jesus. While the way this was presented by the Jews is interesting, it nevertheless confirms that Jesus was turned over to Rome and executed.

Furthermore, the Talmud states in a multitude of locations that Jesus was an illegitimate child and his mother was an adulterous woman who left her husband for another man, which is completely contrary to the teachings of the Christians, who proclaim that their Christ was born of a virgin. Each of these references varies much from those that we have discovered so far, my lord. Who is at fault for this discrepancy? Were the Jewish men spreading falsehoods about Jesus of Nazareth in order to sway the devotion of his followers, or was it the Christians who were to blame? Moreover, these words seem to echo those of Celsus, whom I have already sent to you in my previous report. My lord, I offer up the words of the Talmud to you so that you may discern who is at fault for each discrepancy and may decide what to do about the Christians and their devotion to their Christ.

TO OVIDIUS

Ianuarus 30, consulate of Caesar Flavius Valerius Constantinus Augustus III, Caesar C. Valerius Licinianus Licinius Augustus III, and Caesar Galerius Valerius Maximinus Augustus III^{cvi}
 Seventh letter of Emperor Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus, to Ovidius Quinctilius Calvus, *annalium scriptor* of Byzantium.

My dear Ovidius, thank you for your research and your dedication to your task. As with my previous letters, I will discuss in turn both of the sources you have previously sent to me, those of Celsus and the oral teachings of the people of Judaism.

CELSUS:

First, I will turn my attention to the words of Celsus, as it is he who seems to attack the strongest held beliefs of the Christians, and as his words appear to resound with those of the Jewish leaders at the time, it must be assumed that these are such thoughts of many a Jew and Greek in response to the curious religion of Christianity and its leader. As a second century writer, it is interesting to note that the attacks of Celsus seem to be the very same attacks on Christianity that are made today in the Empire, as people attempt to undermine the followers of Christianity. However, despite the negative view Celsus has towards Jesus of Nazareth and the Christians themselves, it is curious that he never attempts to deny the very existence of Jesus. I could analyze each and every one of the sources you have presented to me, dear Ovidius, of the words of Celsus, for you have given me a great many, yet I believe that the individual words are not as important as the main image and ideas that we are able to grasp from writings of Celsus. As stated before, while he denies the teachings and beliefs of the Christians, it appears that he never attempts to make the claim that Jesus did not exist and was merely a myth fashioned by the

Christians. Therefore, while the account of Celsus may not provide accurate historical facts for us to confirm, his writings further convince me of the historicity of the man the Christians call Christ, Jesus of Nazareth.

TALMUD:

Concerning your writings on the Talmud, I must commend you for your report of an oral tradition, which I must say that I often favor over a written source, for I hold it to be truth that oral tradition is consistently more accurate than the written word. When people write, whether it be letters, history, or teachings and laws, they feel as if they must include every detail of the story, when all that is truly needed is the idea, the point of the matter. The benefit of a changing and shifting oral tradition is that it amends itself on the subject at hand, for while the detail may change, the main story itself will not.^{cix} Therefore, I believe that the writings of the Talmud must still be considered useful for our study, despite the manner in which they have been transmitted.

Of the actual writings, or teachings, of the Talmud, I must correct you, my friend, on one of your points of analysis, that of the method of death for Jesus of Nazareth, for in response to the word "hanged," it must be mentioned that the word at the time it was written was in fact an extremely common synonym for the word "crucifixion", as described by the Christians.^{cx} Therefore, it can be agreed upon by both the Christians and the Jews that Jesus of Nazareth lived and was crucified with no discrepancy to mar that singular agreement.

Dear Ovidius, despite the hostility of these two sources, I find it curious that neither passage ever attempts to deny the existence of Jesus of Nazareth as a man who walked the earth. As to the specific facts of whether or not this man was a god, as the Christians claim, or a mere man, it appears that my conclusion can rest only on the faith of the Christians or the scientific

musings of the skeptics. Thank you, esteemed Ovidius, for your acceptance of my challenge and for your service to both the Empire of Rome and myself during this time of war.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, that is the last of the letters that could be deciphered. There were additional scrolls in the box that are being sent to the lab for a further analysis, but our team here at the excavation site was unable to translate the rest of the letters, which have been damaged by time. Based on the fact that there was a continuation of letters after these, we can expect that Emperor Constantine the Great may have discussed the Edict of Milan with this Ovidius, a writer who was unknown until these letters were unearthed. My team will continue to dig at the site of the box in hope of finding additional treasures that have survived from the ancient city of Constantinople. These letters provide interesting insight as to the history of Christianity as a whole, as well as knowledge about the Roman Empire during its peak under the rule of Emperor Constantine the Great. The following is a summary of the discoveries from all ten sources concerning Christ Jesus of Nazareth and early Christians that Ovidius and Constantine the Great discussed between 311 C.E. and 313 C.E.:

Jesus, who had a brother named James (Josephus), was a wise man (Josephus and Mara Bar Serapion), a miracle worker (Josephus), a prophet whose prophecies were later fulfilled, (Phlegon) and a teacher who gathered a large crowd of supporters. Some of the teachings of Jesus include resurrection, monotheism, and the importance of faith (Lucian of Samosata), and in addition, Jesus taught his followers basic moral laws such as to not steal, lie, or commit adultery (Pliny the Younger). Jesus was executed because he taught spiritual apostasy (Talmud) around the area of Palestine (Lucian of Samosata) and he was turned over by his own people to Pontius Pilate (Tacitus). Before his execution, a herald proclaimed that Jesus would be stoned for his teachings and called for anyone to defend him (Talmud), but when no one stood up for Jesus, he went to the cross to be crucified (Josephus and Mara Bar Serapion) during the reign of Emperor

Tiberius Caesar (Tacitus). The crucifixion occurred on the eve of Passover, when a darkness covered the land for three hours and there was a great earthquake (Thallus and Phlegon of Tralles). Christ's followers left him after his death, but after the resurrection his following grew so strong that Christianity still exists today (Josephus and Pliny the Younger) and, even if his was not a physical resurrection, Jesus lives on today through his teachings (Mara Bar Serapion). Also, it was most likely a physical resurrection because in his resurrected body, people were able to see the marks of the nails in the hands of Jesus (Phlegon of Tralles). Jesus was worshipped as God by his followers (Lucian and Pliny the Younger) and had the title of "King of the Jews" (Mara Bar Serapion).

John the Baptist was a virtuous, pious, and righteous man who baptized people to cleanse them of their sins. John the Baptist also, like Jesus, gained a great following until he was imprisoned by Herod the Great and martyred. (Josephus)

Christians received their name from the word Christ (Suetonius), and after the death of Jesus of Nazareth Christianity declined yet soon experienced a sudden increase in numbers in Judaea and Rome. Christianity was referred to as a superstition by the people of Rome, and Christians were brutally tortured and blamed for the Fire of Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero (Tacitus and Suetonius). Before the fire, Christians had been imprisoned and placed on trial, even though the Romans had no standard to deal with the Christians. Once on trial, the Christians who refused to deny Christ Jesus were executed. Christians who were also Roman citizens were sent back to Rome to be rehabilitated (Pliny the Younger). The Christians were reported to be rebellious during the reign of Emperor Claudius and were expelled from Rome because of the conflict (Suetonius). They met in a worship service where they worshipped Christ as God and refused to participate in sin (Pliny the Younger). Christians were also present during

the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. (Tacitus).^{cx}

This summary comes only from the pagan sources described by Ovidius and Constantine the Great, and it proves that much can be learned about the historicity of Christ Jesus of Nazareth from the use of non-Christian sources.

Please respond at your earliest convenience with instructions as to what you want me to do with the original letters. Our analysis team here at the excavation site will continue to recover as much of the original writings as they can and will work to preserve the letters for future research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Peters

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END NOTES

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- ⁱ "The Consular List."
 - ⁱⁱ Ibid.
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.
 - ^{iv} Ibid.
 - ^v "Josephus." *The Biblical Archaeologist*.
 - ^{vi} "The Consular List."
 - ^{vii} "Josephus." *The Biblical Archaeologist*.
 - ^{viii} "The Consular List."
 - ^{ix} "Josephus, Flavius." *Encyclopedia of World Writers, Beginnings through 13th Century*.
 - ^x Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*. Book 18, Chapter 3, 3.
 - ^{xi} Ibid. Book 20, Chapter 9, 1.
 - ^{xii} Ibid. Book 18, Chapter 5, 2.
 - ^{xiii} Ibid. Book 18, Chapter 3, 3.
 - ^{xiv} Ibid. Book 18, Chapter 5, 2.
 - ^{xv} Ibid. Book 20, Chapter 9, 1.
 - ^{xvi} "The Consular List."
 - ^{xvii} Ibid.
 - ^{xviii} Birley, Anthony R. "The Life and Death of Cornelius Tacitus."
 - ^{xix} "The Consular List."
 - ^{xx} "The Life and Death of Cornelius Tacitus."
 - ^{xxi} Fox, Robin Lane, and Tacitus. *Annals and Histories*.
 - ^{xxii} Ibid.
 - ^{xxiii} Ibid.
 - ^{xxiv} Ibid.
 - ^{xxv} "The Consular List."
 - ^{xxvi} Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*. Book 18, Chapter 3, 3.
 - ^{xxvii} Ibid.
 - ^{xxviii} "For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because John had been saying to him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.' And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet . . . He sent and had John beheaded in the prison" Matthew 14:1-12.
 - ^{xxix} Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*. Book 20, Chapter 9, 1.
 - ^{xxx} Fox, Robin Lane, and Tacitus. *Annals and Histories*.
 - ^{xxxi} Habermas, Gary R. *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*
 - ^{xxxii} "The Consular List."
 - ^{xxxiii} "Pliny the Younger." *Encyclopedia of World Writers, Beginnings through the 13th Century*.
 - ^{xxxiv} Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. pg 3.
 - ^{xxxv} "Pliny the Younger." *Encyclopedia of World Writers, Beginnings through the 13th Century*.
 - ^{xxxvi} Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. pgs 5-6.
 - ^{xxxvii} "Pliny the Younger." *Encyclopedia of World Writers, Beginnings through the 13th Century*.
 - ^{xxxviii} "Pliny and Trajan on the Christians."
 - ^{xxxix} Ibid.
 - ^{xl} Ibid.
 - ^{xli} Ibid.
 - ^{xlii} "The Consular List."
 - ^{xliii} Ibid.
 - ^{xliv} Bunsen, Matthew. "Suetonius."
 - ^{xlvi} Ibid.
 - ^{xlvi} Suetonius. *Lives of the Caesars*.
 - ^{xlvi} Ibid. pg 184.
 - ^{xlvi} Ibid. pg 203.
 - ^{xlix} "The Consular List."

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- ¹ Suetonius. *Lives of the Caesars*. pg 184.
- li "The Consular List."
- lii "Pliny and Trajan on the Christians."
- liii Suetonius. *Lives of the Caesars*. pg 184.
- liv *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. Acts 18:1-2.
- lv Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. pg 52.
- lvi "The Consular List."
- lvii "Lucian of Samosata." *Encyclopedia of Ancient Literature*.
- lviii Lucian of Samosata, and A. M. Harmon. *Lucian of Samosata: The Passing of Peregrinus*. Chapter 11.
- lix Ibid. Chapter 13.
- lx Ibid. Chapter 11.
- lxi Ibid. Chapter 13.
- lxii Ibid.
- lxiii "The Consular List."
- lxiv Ibid.
- lxv Van Voorst, Robert E. *Jesus Outside the New Testament*. page 56.
- lxvi Ibid.
- lxvii Ibid.
- lxviii "The Consular List."
- lxix Mark 15:25-26
- lxx Van Voorst, Robert E. *Jesus Outside the New Testament*. page 56.
- lxxi Mark 13:1-2
- lxxii "The Consular List."
- lxxiii Anderson, J. N. D. *Jesus Christ, the Witness of History*. pg 19.
- lxxiv Eusebius's *Chronicle* is lost for the most part. St. Jerome translated the *Chronicle* into Latin, and although Jerome was not born until 347 C.E., ten years after the death of Emperor Constantine the Great, Jerome's translation is used in this thesis because of the lack of the original work by either Phlegon or Eusebius.
- lxxv Origen. *Origen: Contra Celsum*.
- lxxvi Ibid. Chapter. LIX.
- lxxvii Africanus, Julius. "The Extant Fragments of the Five Books of the Chronography." page 239
- lxxviii Eusebius. "St. Jerome (Hieronymus):Chronological Tables."
- lxxix Origen. *Origen: Contra Celsum*.
- lxxx Ibid.
- lxxxi Ibid.
- lxxxii Ibid. Chapter LIX.
- lxxxiii "The Consular List."
- lxxxiv Ibid.
- lxxxv Ibid.
- lxxxvi Levine, Amy-Jill, Dale C. Allison, and John Dominic Crossan. *The Historical Jesus in Context*. pg 405.
- lxxxvii Thallus, and Richard Carrier. "Thallus and the Darkness at Christ's Death."
- lxxxviii "The Consular List."
- lxxxix Mark 15:33
- xc Caesariensis, Eusebius. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. pg 944
- xcj Ibid.
- xcii Ibid. pg 945
- xciii Ibid. pg 947
- xciv Ibid. pg 946
- xcv "The Consular List."
- xcvi Ibid.
- xcvii Bunsen, Matthew. "Celsus." *Encyclopedia of the Roman Empire, Revised Edition*.
- xcviii Origen. *Origen: Contra Celsum*. Cambridge: U, 1965. pgs 11-12.
- xcix Ibid. pg 72.
- c Ibid. pg 86.
- ci Ibid. pg 169.
- cii Ibid.

ciii "The Consular List."

civ English, Edward D. "Talmud." *Encyclopedia of the Medieval World*.

cv "Talmud - Mas. Sanhedrin." *Halakhah*. Sanhedrin 43a.

cvi Ibid. Sanhedrin 106a.

cvi Ibid. Sanhedrin 67a

cvi "The Consular List."

cix Smith, Dillon. "Ephemerality and Continuity." Thesis.

cx Habermas, Gary R. *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*. Joplin, MO: College Pub., 1996.

Also, crucifixion is referred to as a hanging in the New Testament in Luke 23:39 when referring to the criminals who were crucified next to Jesus, "One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!'".

cxi Ibid.