

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

The Evangelical Quarterly

A Theological Review, International in Scope and Outlook, in Defence of the Historic Christian Faith

Editor: F. F. BRUCE, M.A., D.D.

VOL. XLI

OCTOBER-DECEMBER, 1969

No. 4

SIDELIGHTS ON CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD

by A. J. B. HIGGINS

DR. HIGGINS, Reader in New Testament Language and Literature in the University of Leeds, and author of "Jesus and the Son of Man" and a number of other distinguished contributions to Biblical scholarship, discusses some areas where recent study and discovery have thrown fresh light on the New Testament text.

CHRISTIANITY arose in first-century Palestinian Judaism. As A. N. Sherwin-White has remarked, "The narrative of the three synoptic gospels is set in a world which reflects hardly a touch of Greek or Roman influence until the arrival of Christ in Jerusalem". "The absence of Graeco-Roman colouring is a convincing feature of the Galilaeen narrative and parables. Rightly, it is only when the scene changes to Jerusalem that the Roman administrative machine manifests itself, in all three accounts, with the procurator and his troops and tribunal, and the machinery of taxation."¹ Although the gospels contain fundamentally Palestinian tradition, they would be suspect if they lacked any evidence of the impact of the Graeco-Roman world.

The Roman administration occupies a firm place in the actual creeds of the church; the Nicene Creed: *crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato passus* (σταυρωθέντα τε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πειλάτου καὶ παθόντα); the Apostles' Creed: *passus sub Pontio Pilato, crucifixus* . . . Beyond the historical use in Luke 3: 1 and 13: 1 and the passion narratives, the name of Pilate is beginning to take on a credal use in Acts (3: 13; 4: 27; 13: 28), and especially in 1 Tim. 6: 13, where Jesus is said to have testified to the noble confession ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πειλάτου, "in the time of Pontius Pilate". The passion is assigned a definite historical date.² The death of Jesus was of supreme importance to the early believers. To them, so far from being a mere historical fact, it was the *sine qua non* of faith. The conviction of the New Testament writers is that the witnessed physical event of the crucifixion is an event of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*). Doubts as to the fact of the crucifixion and the historicity of the figure of Jesus, such

¹ A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (1963), pp. 122, 138f.

² Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (1963), p. 143.

as have been entertained by exponents of the Christ-myth theory,³ were to them inconceivable.

That the Roman world was not ignorant of the existence of the founder of the Christian movement is shown by the famous sentence in Tacitus: *auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio affectus erat.*⁴ There is also the report in Suetonius of the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by the emperor Claudius: *Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit.*⁵ Although Chrestus may conceivably be some unknown Jewish agitator, it is much more likely that, since by the time of Suetonius and Tacitus the new movement was known to have been founded by one Christus, the report of Suetonius is a confused reference to the spread of Christianity in Rome, and alludes to the same event as does Acts 18: 2, where Paul at Corinth met the Jew Aquila and his wife Priscilla who had recently arrived from Italy, διὰ τὸ διατεταχέναι Κλαύδιον χωρίζεσθαι πάντας τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἀπὸ τῆς Ῥώμης.⁶

In this paper we shall be concerned with several topics of individually intrinsic interest, which may, or have been thought to, shed some light on Christian beginnings in the Graeco-Roman world.

I. THE CENSUS UNDER AUGUSTUS⁷

Of this we read in Luke 2: 2, αὕτη ἀπογραφὴ πρώτη ἐγένετο ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς Συρίας Κυρηνίου. This cannot mean that this census was the first ever taken by the Romans, for a periodical census was held under the Republic and by Augustus. It may, however, mean either that the first census of Judaea was taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria, or that this census was the first to be taken by Quirinius during his term of office. I

³ On this see H. G. Wood, *Did Christ Really Live?* (1938).

⁴ Tacitus, *Ann.* xv. 44.

⁵ Suetonius, *Claudius* xxv. 3.

⁶ Cf. *The Beginnings of Christianity*, ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, iv (1933), pp. 221f., v (1933), pp. 459f. "Christus" and "Chrestus" were pronounced in much the same way; cf. J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius* (1963), p. 2, who remarks: "The garbled form *Chrestus* might be taken by the authorities as the name of a contemporary individual, particularly as his supporters would insist that he was still alive". There is also the disputed *Testimonium Flavianum* (Josephus, *Ant.* XVIII. iii. 3 [63-64]), with mention of Pilate's condemnation of Jesus to crucifixion. This may be a Christianized version of an original Josephan text; cf. L. H. Feldman in the Loeb Josephus, vol. ix (1965), p. 49, n.

⁷ On Quirinius and the census see the bibliography in vol. ix of the Loeb Josephus, appendix B; A. N. Sherwin-White, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-71; J. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (1964), pp. 234-38.

propose to show that neither of these alternatives is necessarily correct.

Luke 2: 2 is usually understood as associating the birth of Jesus with the census in A.D. 6 which, on the deposition of Archelaus as ethnarch, formed part of the annexation procedure carried out by P. Sulpicius Quirinius, the new legate of Syria at the same time as Coponius took office as the first governor of Judaea.⁸ But in this case Luke is contradicting both his own statement in 1: 5 that the events to be narrated, the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, took place "in the days of Herod the king of Judaea", and the Matthaean chronology, for Matt. 2: 1 states that Jesus was born "in Bethléhem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king". Since Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., Luke would be guilty of a discrepancy of at least ten years in connecting the nativity with the census under Quirinius. That Luke knew about this census appears from his reference to it in connection with uprising of Judas the Galilaean at the time (Acts 5: 37).

If, however, this is the census of Luke 2: 2, it is very difficult to accept such a late date as A.D. 6 for the nativity. If that is what Luke means, then he is inconsistent not only, as we have seen, with his statement in 1: 5, but also with his statement that Jesus was about thirty years old (Luke 3: 23) in the fifteenth year of Tiberius (Luke 3: 1), i.e., A.D. 28-29. If Jesus was born in A.D. 6 he would have been only twenty-two or twenty-three, which is hardly "about thirty".

Another possibility is that Luke has mistaken the time of the census and antedated it to the reign of Herod. This would be surprising in view both of his acknowledged accuracy in dealing with the Graeco-Roman world in Acts and of his prefatory remarks addressed to Theophilus at the beginning of his gospel.

Alternatively, but again not to his credit, it has been suggested that he has confused the census of A.D. 6 with an earlier one during a previous governorship of Quirinius over Syria in the lifetime of Herod. Scholars are divided on this question. Thus H. E. W. Turner writes: "Attempts to find room for a governorship of Quirinius in Syria during the reign of Herod the Great fail to convince".⁹ On the other hand, it has been supposed that the date intended by Luke is about 6 B.C., and that Quirinius was in charge of the foreign relations of Syria, although the actual legate was C. Sentius Saturninus (9-6 B.C.).

⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* XVIII. i. 1.

⁹ "The Chronological Framework of the Ministry", *Historicity and Chronology in the New Testament* (1965), p. 62.

Tertullian actually asserts that this Saturninus himself carried out a census in Judaea at the time of Jesus's birth: *sed et census constat actos sub Augusto tunc in Iudaea per Sentium Saturninum*.¹⁰ This may be no more than a deliberate correction of Luke, intended to remove the chronological inconsistency already mentioned. There is no other evidence that Saturninus conducted a census in Judaea. The possibility of the holding of a census by the Roman authorities in a client state has been doubted, although perhaps on inadequate grounds. H. E. W. Turner suggests that a census was taken in Judaea in the time of Saturninus as part of measures adopted by Augustus against Herod, whom he had demoted from the status of "friend" to that of subject.¹¹

If Luke's accuracy as the first Christian historian is to be defended, his statement at 2: 2 may perhaps mean that the census at the time of the nativity was held not under the governorship of Quirinius of which we know (or during an earlier [hypothetical] period of office), but before it.

M. J. Lagrange understood Luke 2: 2 to mean, "This census was before that held while Quirinius was governor of Syria". This involves taking πρώτη as equivalent to προτέρα. Lagrange cites a number of examples of πρώτος with the comparative force of πρότερος.¹² The example in John 1: 15, 30 (πρώτός μου ἦν) differs from the above interpretation of Luke 2: 2 in that the comparison is direct, whereas in Luke it is thought that something has to be supplied.¹³ Such a compendious comparison, of course, is familiar.¹⁴ But the participle in Luke 2: 2 makes this construction difficult to justify. In John 15: 18 (ἐμὲ πρόωτον ὑμῶν μείσηκεν) πρόωτον used adverbially is equivalent to πρό. It may be suggested that in Luke 2: 2 πρώτη is virtually equivalent not only to προτέρα but to πρότερον or πρό.¹⁵ If this is conceded, there is no need to infer a compendious comparison, and πρώτη governs the participial phrase. The Greek means, "This census took place

¹⁰ *Adv. Marcionem* iv. 19.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 64f.; Josephus, *Ant.* XVI. ix. 3 (290).

¹² *Revue Biblique*, n.s. viii (1911), pp. 80-84. As supporters of this interpretation he mentions Calmet, Wallon, Huschke, Wieseler, Ewald, and Caspari.

¹³ Cf. also Liddell and Scott, p. 1535; Blass-Debrunner-Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (1961), sect. 62.

¹⁴ Cf. N. Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (1965), pp. 23f., reviving the suggestion of Lagrange.

¹⁵ E. g., John 5: 36, ἐγὼ δὲ ἐχω τὴν μαρτυρίαν μετ' ἐμοῦ τοῦ Ἰωάννου.

¹⁶ Cf. Lagrange, *loc. cit.*, p. 80.

before Quirinius was governor of Syria". Luke is not distinguishing an earlier census from one during the governorship of Quirinius, but is merely stating that the census at the time of the nativity took place some time before Quirinius held office. A possible objection to this interpretation would be Luke's silence about the well-known census held by Quirinius. But since it was so well known because it marked the transition of Judaea from the status of a kingdom to a Roman province, was there any need to mention it? So interpreted, Luke's statement informs the reader that Jesus was born before Roman control became complete, but at a time when Herod organized a census in his own territory (on the instructions of Augustus?), in fact, as in Luke 1: 5, "in the days of Herod the king of Judaea".¹⁷

II. PILATE: PROCURATOR OR PRAEFECTUS?

Tacitus (Ann. 15: 44) calls Pontius Pilatus *procurator*. The corresponding Greek term is ἐπίτροπος, but in the New Testament it is applied neither to Pilate nor to any other governor of Judaea. The New Testament always uses ἡγεμόνων in reference to Pilate (Matt. 27: 2, 11, 14, 15, 21, 27; 28: 14; Luke 20: 20), and also in reference to Antonius Felix (52-60; Acts 23: 24, 26, 33; 24: 1, 10) and to Porcius Festus (60-62; Acts 26: 30). Josephus also calls Pilate by this title.¹⁸ To the New Testament use of this title may be added Luke 3: 1, ἡγεμονεύοντος Ποντίου Πειλάτου τῆς Ἰουδαίας. There is a secondary variant ἐπιτροπεύοντος (D. Eusebius [*partim*]), a word used by Josephus in reference to Cuspius Fadus (44-46).¹⁹ But this variant cannot be regarded as supporting

¹⁷ B. Reicke, *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte* (1965), pp. 79, 101, supposes that in the Lukan tradition a census held by Herod the Great has been confused with that of Quirinius. Lagrange, *loc. cit.*, p. 83, cites as a parallel to his interpretation of Luke 2: 2 the expression in Jer. 36: 2 (LXX; Heb. 29: 2), ὕστερον ἐξελθόντος Ἰεχονίου τοῦ βασιλέως . . . ἐξ Ἰερουσαλήμ, "after king Jeconiah . . . had departed from Jerusalem". This tends rather, however, to support the above suggestion that πρώτη in Luke 2: 2 governs directly the genitive participial phrase. The translation of F. M. Heichelheim (quoted in vol. ix, p. 3 of the Loeb Josephus), "This census was the first before that under the prefectureship of Quirinius in Syria", seems to attach two meanings to πρώτη. Dr. G. Ogg's authoritative article, "The Quirinius Question Today", *Expository Times* lxxix. 8 (May 1968), pp. 231-36, appeared after the completion of the present study. Some of his observations closely resemble mine; but he arrives at a different conclusion, and prefers the admittedly more grammatical rendering (by classical standards), "This census was the first (in Judaea) and was made when Quirinius was governor of Syria".

¹⁸ *Ant.* XVIII. iii. 1 (55).

¹⁹ *Ant.* XX. v. 1 (97).

the accuracy of Tacitus' application of the title *procurator* to Pilate nor of ἐπίτροπος in Josephus.²⁰ Under Claudius the equestrian provincial governors came to be called *procuratores* instead of *praefecti*,²¹ and Tacitus employs the later term familiar to him. But Josephus is inconsistent in his terminology, and applies both titles ἐπίτροπος (*procurator*) and ἑπαρχος (*praefectus*) to the earlier and later periods alike. Cuspius Fadus is called ἐπίτροπος,²² but so is Pilate,²³ while both Valerius Gratus²⁴ (15-26) and Lucceius Albinus²⁵ (62-64) are styled ἑπαρχος. The matter would seem to be resolved by the Pilate inscription found at Caesarea in 1961, which reads

ΠΟΝΤΙΩΣ ΠΙΛΑΤΟΣ [ΠΡΑΕΦ]ΕΚΤΩΣ ΙΟΥΔΑ[ΕΑ]Σ.²⁶

III. THE LANGUAGES OF PALESTINE

(a) *The titulus*

Like the synoptics, the Fourth Gospel says that a notice stating the crime for which Jesus had been found guilty, the claim to be king of the Jews, was affixed to the cross. Only the latter, however, employs the official term τίτλος, and adds that it was written in three languages, Ἑβραϊστί, Ῥωμαϊστί, Ἑλληνιστί.²⁷ This reflects the use of three languages in Judaea in the first century.²⁸ By Hebrew is probably meant Aramaic, the popular language of Jews. Latin was the language of the Roman military establishment and legal administration. Greek in its Hellenistic form was firmly established as the medium of commerce both in Judaea and in Galilee, as throughout the Roman world.

That Jesus had some knowledge of Latin is possible, but

²⁰ *Bell. Iud.* II. ix. 2 (169).

²¹ Cf. E. Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* I. ii (1908), pp. 45f.; A. N. Sherwin-White, *op. cit.*, pp. 6f., 12. According to the latter the *praefectus* of Judaea was first styled *procurator* in the period after A.D. 44 (p. 98 in *Historicity and Chronology in the New Testament*). Schürer (*op. cit.*, I. ii, p. 46, n. 25) had only admitted as possible the earlier use of the title *praefectus* in Judaea.

²² *Ant.* XX. i. 2 (14).

²³ *Bell. Iud.* II. ix. 2 (169).

²⁴ *Ant.* XVIII. ii. 2 (33).

²⁵ *Ant.* XX. ix. 1 (197).

²⁶ Cf. J. Vardaman in *Journal of Biblical Literature* lxxxii (1962), pp. 70f.

²⁷ John 19: 19f. Certain manuscripts, however, insert in Luke 23: 38 that the inscription was written γράμμασι ἑλληνικοῖς καὶ ῥωμαῖκοῖς καὶ ἑβραϊκοῖς, in imitation of John 19: 20; see the *apparatus criticus* to Luke 23: 38 in *The Greek New Testament*, ed. K. Aland, M. Black, B. M. Metzger, A. Wikgren (1966).

²⁸ Cf. G. Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua* (1929), pp. 1-37, discussing Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew.

incapable of proof.²⁹ The influence of Hellenism and of the Greek language in Palestine³⁰ makes it probable, however, that he sometimes spoke Greek. It has even been suggested that he normally spoke Greek,³¹ and that a number of his Greek sayings have been preserved in the gospels in a more or less accurate form,³² as well as others originally uttered in Aramaic or Hebrew. But this is a different matter. The internal evidence of the gospels does not support theories of this kind, and the most probable hypothesis is still that the Greek sayings are derived from Aramaic (and sometimes Hebrew) traditions.

(b) *Jewish ossuary inscriptions.*

Further evidence of the currency of Greek in Palestine as well as of the two Semitic languages in New Testament times comes from inscriptions, sometimes bilingual, on Jewish ossuaries. In view of the variety of the interpretations of them which have been offered, the Jesus inscriptions, some in Aramaic and others in Greek, are of particular interest.³³ Since the inscriptions on ossuaries give the names of those whose remains they contain, they illustrate the otherwise well known frequency of Jesus (=Jeshua or Joshua) as a Jewish name in the New Testament period. Even "Jesus son of Joseph" (in Aramaic) appears on one of the ossuaries. The most interesting of these Jesus inscriptions are two discovered by E. L. Sukenik in 1945 at Talpioth, a suburb of Jerusalem, and assigned by him to the first half of the first century A.D.³⁴ The graffiti read as follows.

²⁹ The theory advanced by the Jesuit Jean Hardouin (1646-1729) in his *Commentarius in Novum Testamentum* (published posthumously in 1741), that Jesus and the apostles preached in Latin as the most widely used language in Palestine, is a baseless curiosity of criticism; cf. *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* vi (1925), col. 2045.

³⁰ Cf. S. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (1942).

³¹ A. Roberts, *Inquiry into the Original Language of St. Matthew's Gospel* (1859), ch. 2, "Language of Palestine in the Time of Christ"; *Discussions on the Gospels* (1862) [= *Greek the Language of Christ and His Apostles* (1888)]; T. K. Abbott, *Essays on the Original Texts of the Old and New Testaments* (1891). Of these works only the first has been accessible to me; on p. 27 the author refers to the attempt of Diodati (*De Christo Graece Loquente*, Naples 1767) to prove that by the time of Jesus Greek had entirely supplanted Aramaic in Palestine.

³² R. H. Gundry, "The Language Milieu of First-Century Palestine", *Journal of Biblical Literature* lxxxiii (1964), pp. 404-8.

³³ See the list of nine, of which five are in Aramaic and four in Greek, in E. Dinkler's article, "Comments on the History of the Symbol of the Cross", *Journal for Theology and the Church* i (1965), p. 131, n. 29.

³⁴ E. L. Sukenik, "The Earliest Records of Christianity", *American Journal of Archaeology* li (1947), pp. 351-65.

No. 1. ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΙΟΥ (written with charcoal).

No. 2. ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΑΛΩΘ (incised).³⁵

The following interpretations have been suggested.

Sukenik himself understood no. 1 to mean "Jesus-woe", in the sense of an exclamation of sorrow for his crucifixion addressed to Jesus of Nazareth. As for no. 2, he very tentatively suggested that αλωθ is connected with an Aramaic or Hebrew verb ('*ālāh*), and the meaning is, "Jesus-weep" to be understood on the same lines as no. 1. Sukenik regarded these two graffiti as the oldest known archaeological evidence of Christianity. A strong objection to his interpretation of them is that the early Christian attitude was not sorrow for the death of Jesus, but joy inspired by belief in his resurrection.

B. Gustafsson³⁶ accepts Sukenik's translation of graffito no. 1, but in a completely different sense, as an invocation to Jesus, "roughly meaning 'Jesus, Help'".³⁷ The words are a prayer on behalf of the dead person whose remains lie in the ossuary. He rejects Sukenik's interpretation of no. 2, and translates, "Jesus, let (him who rests here) arise". He reaches this result by taking αλωθ to be a transliteration of the infinitive of the Hebrew verb '*ālāh*' used in the jussive or cohortative sense, and points to the use of this verb in Ezek. 37: 12f. with the meaning of rising up from death. The two graffiti are "a remarkable testimony to the oldest Church's faith in Jesus as the arisen Lord" and deliverer from death.³⁸

According to D. Fishwick³⁹ the enigmatic ΙΟΥ and αλωθ are abbreviations respectively of Yahweh and Sabaoth, and are to be classed with Jewish magical incantations of which other examples are known. The name Jesus is to be explained in a similar way. This is not the name of the person whose bones were contained in the ossuary, but part of the magical inscription. Fishwick concludes that the graffiti "provide the earliest evidence of Christian influences within Jewish syncretic magic".⁴⁰ The primary objection to this interpretation is that no evidence is provided of other magical incantations on ossuaries.⁴¹

³⁵ I have numbered them thus for convenience of reference.

³⁶ "The Oldest Graffiti in the History of the Church?" *New Testament Studies* iii (1956), pp. 65-9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³⁹ "The Talpioth Ossuaries Again", *New Testament Studies* x (1963), pp. 49-61.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴¹ Cf. G. Krodel in *Journal for Theology and the Church* i (1965), p. 146.

The first two of the explanations outlined above labour under the disadvantage of offering dubious and differing interpretations of $\alpha\lambda\omega\theta$, while all three are at variance with the natural view that, as on other ossuaries, the names on these two are those of the dead whose bones they contain. The interpretation suggested by Dinkler⁴² is therefore to be preferred. Graffito no. 1 means "Jesus, son of Elias, $\iota\omicron\upsilon$ being the gentive of $\iota\lambda\omicron\varsigma$, a proper name found in an Egyptian papyrus of the fourth century A.D.⁴³ Graffito no. 2 means "Jesus, son of Aloth", the latter name occurring in a Greek Fayum papyrus of A.D. 158⁴⁴. Despite the rarity of the two names, Dinkler's interpretation of the graffiti has great advantages over the others, and is probably correct. There is no need of recourse to Hebrew or Aramaic in order to explain $\alpha\lambda\omega\theta$. The difficulties of this word and of $\iota\omicron\upsilon$ disappear if they are, as one would expect, (Greek) patronymics. But along with these difficulties disappears also any possible allusion to Jesus of Nazareth. The inscriptions do not contribute anything, as Sukenik thought,⁴⁵ to the historicity of Jesus and his crucifixion. Moreover, they add nothing to our knowledge of the reaction of the early Christians to the crucifixion nor to what they believed was its sequel. What they do is to supply further inscriptional evidence of the frequency, still obtaining at that period, of Jesus as a Jewish name, and of the use of Greek among Palestinian Jews.⁴⁶

IV. VIOLATION OF TOMBS

In Matt. 27: 62-66; 28: 11-15 there is the story of the origin of the Jewish calumny directed against the Christian claim that Jesus had been raised from the dead, namely, that the disciples had stolen his body from the tomb by night. This charge continued to be made, as we know from Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century,⁴⁷ and is found much later in the Hebrew

⁴² *Op. cit.*, pp. 130f.

⁴³ F. Preisigke, *Namenbuch* (1922), col. 146.

⁴⁴ Preisigke, *op. cit.*, col. 21: $\iota\lambda\omega\theta(\iota\varsigma)$?

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 365.

⁴⁶ Cf. C. H. Kraeling, "Christian Burial Urns?" *The Biblical Archaeologist* ix (1946), pp. 16-20, writing shortly after the discovery of the Talpioth ossuaries. I have not been concerned with the cross markings on ossuary no. 2, which are discussed at length by Dinkler, *op. cit.*, pp. 132ff. These may be ornamental or, according to Dinkler, Jewish signs invoking Yahweh's protection of the dead from demonic powers.

⁴⁷ *Dialogue with Trypho* cviii.

Toledoth Yeshu.⁴⁸ Further light has sometimes been thought to be thrown on this matter by a Greek inscription (probably translated from Latin) said to have come from Nazareth, containing an imperial rescript threatening with death anyone found guilty of violating and disturbing tombs and removing the bodies.⁴⁹ It is very doubtful, however, whether there is any direct connection with the story in Matthew. The inscription is dated to the early part of the first century, whereas the gospel of Matthew belongs approximately to the period A.D. 80-90. The story in Matthew is absent from Mark, and is part of the latest stratum of the gospel. The charge that the body of Jesus was stolen from the tomb cannot have originated much earlier than the date of Matthew, unless undue importance is attached to the statement that the story had (long) been disseminated among the Jews μέχρι τῆς σήμερον (Matt. 28: 15). Moreover, there is no evidence of Pilate taking proceedings against the disciples on the pretext of tomb spoliation. If the rescript is a reply to reports of tomb spoliation submitted by a provincial governor, there is nothing to indicate any link with the story in Matthew. An interesting but unproven theory, attempting to link the inscription with Christianity, is that the emperor in question is Claudius, and that the purpose of his rescript, perhaps addressed to the procurator of the province of Judaea, in which Galilee was incorporated in A.D. 44, was to bring to an end a practice which had initiated the now troublesome Christian movement.⁵⁰

University of Leeds.

⁴⁸ This, although from the tenth century in its present form, is evidence of Jewish ideas from the fifth century onwards; cf. J. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* (1947), pp. 47-54.

⁴⁹ M. Goguel, "Sur une inscription de Nazareth", *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie religieuses* x (1930), pp. 289-93.

⁵⁰ Cf. F. F. Bruce, "Christianity under Claudius", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* xlv (1962), pp. 318-21. But the inscription may be as early as the time of Augustus; cf., e. g., C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (1956), p. 14. It is not included by P. R. Coleman-Norton in his magnificent collection of legal documents concerning the church, *Roman State and Christian Church*, 3 vols. (1966).