

Secular Evidence That 'Jesus' Existed
from Jews for Jesus
<http://www.jfjonline.org/pub/issues/05-05/noreal.htm>

Josephus Jewish Antiquities (c.93 C.E.)
(later interpolations in brackets)

"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 Messiah.] And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him [for he appeared to them alive again at 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 date.¹

Pliny the Younger Letter to Trajan (c.111-117 C.E.)

"...they maintained that their fault or error amounted to nothing more than this: they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before sunrise and reciting an antiphonal hymn to Christ as God, and binding themselves with an oath not to commit any crime, but to abstain from all acts of theft, robbery and adultery, from breaches of faith, from repudiating a trust when called upon to honour it."²

Tacitus Roman Annals (c.115-117 C.E.)

"They got their name from Christ, who was executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. That checked the pernicious superstition for a short time, but it broke out afresh--not only in Judea, where the plague first arose, but in Rome itself, where all the horrible and shameful things in the world collect and find a home."³

Sanhedrin 43a (200-500 C.E.)

"On the eve of the Passover Yeshu⁴ 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. Any one 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 Passover!'"⁵

Endnotes

1. Antiquities xviii. 33 (early second century) from F.F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 37.
2. Pliny, *Epistles* x.96, from Bruce, p.26.
3. Tacitus, *Annals* xv, 44, from Bruce, p. 22.
4. Talmudic designation of Jesus.
5. "Sanhedrin," vol 3 of *Nezikin, Babylonian Talmud*, edited by Isidore Epstein, reprint (London: Soncino, 1938), 281.

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<http://www.webcom.com/ctt/jesusref.html>

Jesus lived His public life in the land of Palestine under the Roman rule of Tiberius (ad 14-37). There are four Roman historical sources for his reign: Tacitus (55-117), Suetonius (70-160), Velleius Paterculus (a contemporary), and Dio Cassius (3rd century). There are two Jewish historical resources that describe events of this period: Josephus (37-100?), writing in Greek, and the Rabbinical Writings (written in Hebrew after 200, but much of which would have been in oral form prior to that time).

Of these writings, we would NOT expect Velleius to have a reference to Jesus (i.e. the events were just happening OUTSIDE of Velleius' home area), and Dio Cassius is OUTSIDE of our time window of pre-3rd century. Of the remaining Roman writers--Tacitus and Suetonius--we have apparent references to Jesus (discussed below). If these are genuine and trustworthy 'mentions' of Jesus, then we have an amazing fact--ALL the relevant non-Jewish historical sources mention Jesus! (Notice that this is the OPPOSITE situation than is commonly assumed--"If Jesus was so important, why didn't more historians write about Him?" In this case, THEY ALL DID!).

Of the Jewish resources--Josephus and the Rabbinical writings (e.g. Talmud, Midrash)--BOTH make clear references to the existence of Jesus (even though the details reported may be odd). So ALL the Jewish sources refer to Him.

In addition, there are three OTHER candidates for historical 'mentions' of Jesus that fall in the 2nd century: one Roman (Pliny the Younger) , one possibly Syrian (Mara Bar Serapion), and one Samaritan (Thallus).

I would like to take these in probable historical order.

- * (First, a methodological note about the issue of 'independent sources')
- * Thallus (c. 50-75ad) [4/2/96]
- * Josephus (Antiquities of the Jews, c.93) [The best current discussion on this passage is in a skeptical piece by my friend Jeff Lowder.]
- * Letter from Pliny the Younger to Trajan (c. 110)
- * Tacitus (Annals, c.115-120) [The best current discussion on this passage is at JP Holding's website]
- * Suetonius (Lives of the Caesars, c. 125)
- * Galen (various writings, c.150)
- * Celsus (True Discourse, c.170).
- * Mara Bar Serapion (pre-200?)
- * Talmudic References(written after 300 CE, but some refs probably go back to eyewitnesses)