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Is the Forgery of Tacitus' Annals in the Renaissance an Untenable Position?

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Greetings neilgodfrey,

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07-14-2008, 11:44 AM

#1

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

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Location: Ontario, Canada

Posts: 1,435

Is the Forgery of Tacitus' Annals in the Renaissance an Untenable Position?

Not that I want to give the recently buried Fathom a chance at resurrection, but the question of the authenticity of Tacitus' Christian reference is a subject I am engaged in at the moment, and it involved a consideration of Roger Pearse's tertullian site on which he discusses the non-feasibility of the theory that the *Annals* was a Renaissance forgery. I pointed out that some of his material on that was too vague and even misleading, and sent him the section on that subject from my new chapter on Tacitus for the second edition of The Jesus Puzzle. He suggested I post it (the section, not the whole chapter) here, for discussion. I'll preface it by saying that I do not subscribe to the Renaissance forgery theory, but my section on it entails a fuller study of the source used by Roger in support of his position, and it does have something to say toward the general issue of the Tacitean reference to Christ and Christians. (Please forgive me if I don't take the

trouble to italicize all the appearances of book titles.)

Could Tacitus' *Annals* be a Renaissance Forgery?

There has long been a popular line of thought that the entire *Annals* as we have it may be a Renaissance forgery, perhaps by the Italian who allegedly "discovered" it, a certain Poggio Bracciolini in the 15th century. This is something of an urban legend that has taken on a life of its own (perhaps as persistent as Robert Eisler's description of Jesus in the *Halosis* being somehow reliable), but it does take a certain effort to discredit it. For most of the following, I am dependent upon C. W. Mendell's *Tacitus: The Man and his Work*, published in 1957.

The current strength of our 'urban legend' proceeds from the end of the 19th century in two books by W. R. Ross and P. Hochart. Arthur Drews a century ago accepted the latter's case and considered the forgery theory persuasive, and while no mainstream Tacitean scholars accepted it (and still don't) other skeptics of Drews' day came on board as well. (Their views often crop up in Internet lists of reasons to reject *Annals* 15:44 as being authentic to Tacitus.)

But as Mendell recounts, the first six books of the *Annals* (with the exception of a few hiatuses, including those two years covering the period when Jesus' ministry was traditionally thought to have taken place) survive only in a single manuscript known as Medicean I, found in Germany shortly after 1500. This text is in Carolingian minuscules identified with the 9th century. It is almost certainly the surviving portion of a manuscript which contained the complete *Annals* as well as the *Histories*, from which, at some point, it was split off as part of a first volume. The second volume, containing *Annals* 11-16 as well as the *Histories*, does not survive, but it gave rise to the manuscript known as Medicean II, containing the latter part of the *Annals*, as well as to all of the now-known manuscripts of the *Histories*. Medicean II is from the 11th century, and there is evidence that it was used at Monte Cassino before 1340. The material in Medicean I seems to have been used at Fulda in the 9th century. So there is indication that both parts of the *Annals* were known before the 15th century.

Around 1360, Boccaccio discovered what may have been the original Volume 2 containing the later books of the *Annals* and the *Histories*. He spread knowledge of these works throughout much of Europe, and a search for others led to the above-mentioned discovery of Medicean I. (It is not clear when *Annals* 7-10 became lost, or whether they were an original part of one of the volumes.) Boccaccio's manuscript ended up in the hands of Niccolò Niccoli in the early 15th century, and was loaned to Poggio Bracciolini in 1427, but was returned as being in too poor a state to be used. Subsequently, it (or was it a copy of it?) went to the Laurentian Library in Florence, as did Medicean I. The first printing-press edition of *Annals* 11-16 (plus the *Histories*) was published about 1470, not from the Boccaccio

manuscript, but apparently from a descendant, now in Venice.

Some confusion is created by the fact that, apparently some time prior to Jerome, the Histories and the Annals were combined into a single series, known as "*Ab excessu divi augusti*" (From the death of the divine Augustus). Although written first, the Histories covered the later period of the Flavian emperors (Vespasian, Titus and Domitian), beginning in the year 69 with the civil wars involving Galba, Otho and Vitellius. The latter part of the Histories is missing, breaking off in the year 70 before the end of the Jewish War and in the middle of a campaign against the German tribes on the Rhine. The Annals was written later, going back and covering the earlier period of the Julio-Claudians, from Tiberius to Nero; portions of that work are missing as well. Eventually, the two were combined in reverse order to present a 'lives of the Caesars' from Tiberius to the Flavians (somewhat as William Whiston in his translation of Josephus presented the Antiquities of the Jews before the Jewish War as though a single history, even though they were written in reverse order). In the original Tacitus compendium (which Jerome refers to), the fourteen books of the Histories were tacked on to the sixteen books of the Annals as numbers 17 to 30; sometime over the next several centuries, the last nine books of the Histories became lost.

Now let's survey the references to Tacitus in the period after publication up to the time of Boccaccio in the 14th century. For purposes relating to the authenticity of Annals 15:44, it is of course necessary to make a distinction between which particular works of Tacitus are being referred to. There is no dispute that Tacitus was known throughout late antiquity and through the Middle Ages. But to what extent and in regard to which works? Mendell states that use of his writings

"up to the time of Boccaccio is slight. It is not true, however, that Tacitus and his writings were practically unknown. They were neglected..." (p.225)

By far, however, such knowledge and use as can be seen is restricted to the Histories and certain minor works. The Annals is scarcely in view at all. Thus, Mendell's comment that "Tacitus is mentioned or quoted in each century down to and including the sixth" should not be used to support or imply a wide knowledge or use of the Annals in the centuries before the later Middle Ages.

1. The first of those listed by Mendell (p.225f) relates to the Annals, but it is a shaky one. The geographer and astronomer Ptolemy in the middle of the second century lists towns along the northern shore of Germany. Two are given as (in Greek) "*Phl̄eoum*" and "***Siatoutanda***." Mendell says: "The latter name occurs nowhere else and has a dubious sound." In Annals 4:72-73, Tacitus is recounting the raising of the siege of the fortress of "Flevum"

at the mouth of the Rhine by the Frisii. This matches the first town named by Ptolemy. For the second, Mendell (drawing on a German 1888 study) points to one of the sentences in that account. In Latin, the final phrase of it reads: "...et ad **sua tutanda** degressis rebellibus." In English: "[(Apronius) threw (his forces) on the Frisii, raising at once the siege of the fortress] and dispersing the rebels in defence of their own possessions." Compare the words in bold. One must admire the search programs of 1888, but this seems somewhat bizarre, despite Mendell's claim that "The source of Ptolemy's mistake is obvious." A competent geographer invents a town on the German coast by reading a passage in Tacitus, finds two Latin words not referring to a town at all and mistakes and accepts them as a place name? If that is the extent of alleged references to the Annals that can be deduced in the first three centuries after it was written (and it seems to be), one may be forgiven for regarding the situation as desperate.

2. Cassius Dio (early 3rd century) seems to draw on Tacitus' *Agricola*, a biographical work about his father-in-law. Dio, as we have seen, passed up any reference to the Christians from Annals 15 when composing his own material on Nero and the great fire.

3. Tertullian, in *Apology* 16, is defending the Christians against the charge that they worshiped an ass. He claims that it was Tacitus who started this "notion," referring to the *Histories*, Book 5. Mendell misleadingly says, "(Tacitus) had spoken without respect of the Jews and had implied that the Christians were an undesirable sect of the Jews." But the 'implication' is entirely Tertullian's, even if he is imputing it to Tacitus, when he recounts Tacitus' version of the consecration of an ass's head by Jews after the Exodus, since this animal had led them to water in the desert. He says: "And as Christianity is nearly allied to Judaism, from this, I suppose, it was taken for granted that we too are devoted to the worship of the same image." Then he goes on to tell of Tacitus' account of Pompey's capture of Jerusalem (67 BCE) and his entry into the temple sanctuary. Needless to say, the *Histories* V contains no mention of Christians.

4. The same discussion appears again in *Ad Nationes* I, 11. And in II, 12 a statement about Saturn is noted in the same book of the *Histories*.

5. Lactantius (late 3rd century) is appealed to as on one occasion showing "a resemblance" with the style of Tacitus' minor work,

Germania.

6. Eumenius of Autun (same period) shows reliance on Tacitus' *Agricola*.

7. Vopiscus (4th century) cites Tacitus as one of the greatest of Roman historians. He mentions certain techniques, but does not appeal to any specific text.

8. Says Mendell: "Ammianus Marcellinus, about 400, published his history, which began where Tacitus left off, indicating a knowledge at least of what Tacitus had written." Since the *Histories* is where Tacitus "left off," this tells us little if anything about the extent of knowledge about the *Annals*.

9. Claudian, late Roman poet of the 4th century, makes references to Tiberius and Nero, but a derivation from Tacitus cannot be affirmed. Servius, a grammarian of the same period, refers to a lost passage of Tacitus, whether from the *Annals* or the *Histories* cannot be said.

10. Pseudo-Hegesippus (c.380) contains "additions" from the *Histories*.

11. Mendell talks of two 5th century writers: Sidonius Apollinaris quotes from *Histories* V, while Orosius' citations in his *Adversos Paganos* are all from the *Histories*.

12. Cassiodorus in the 6th century draws on *Germania* and echoes *Histories* IV, 15. A little later, Jordanes shows knowledge of *Agricola*.

I have left out of Mendell's list of "each century down to and including the sixth" the two we are familiar with, Sulpicius Severus and the comment by Jerome, both around the year 400. As can be seen, in the above list not a single offering after the very dubious inference regarding Ptolemy's town in Germany relates to the *Annals*. This is not meant to give support to the theory that the *Annals* is a Renaissance forgery; but it does serve to indicate how little knowledge and usage the *Annals* seems to have enjoyed for centuries after it was written. We cannot, of course, say that other indications could not have existed that we have lost sight of. But it is clear that the *Annals*, and with it the specific passage of 15:44, has made virtually no recognizable impression on centuries of Christian writers—something quite surprising in view of the alleged presence in it of the Christ/Christians passage. In fact, in our line of vision, we can recognize but one, Sulpicius Severus. As for Jerome, he simply referred (*Commentary on Zacchariah* XIV, 1.2) to a tradition known to him that Tacitus had written a history from the death of Augustus to the death of Domitian in 30 books. Mendell admits that "he may not even have seen his works at all." Still, this would testify to the existence of the *Annals* in the

4th century.

We do not know when the Histories and the Annals were combined into a composite presentation, so evidence of knowledge of the former prior to Jerome does not necessarily entail a tag-along knowledge of the latter, let alone our key passage, especially when such specific usage of the Annals is perplexingly missing, as in Tertullian and Cassius Dio. Besides, the Tacitus 'boxed set' Jerome refers to does not necessarily indicate that from that point on, both works only circulated in combination. We might expect separate copying of the Histories and the Annals to continue in some areas. On the matter of the spurious letters between Paul and Seneca, one of which alludes to a general accusation against Christians and Jews for setting fires, it does not specify the great fire at Rome, nor mention any Neronian persecution, much less refer to Tacitus. Mendell considers it "less likely that the author of the correspondence...knew Tacitus."

As we have seen, even the passage in Sulpicius Severus has its problems. He does not *cite* Tacitus. His 'quote' is not nearly as "word for word" as is often claimed, although some words and the sequence of ideas virtually guarantee a literary derivation in one direction or the other. But that direction need not be an either/or situation, since we do not need to regard the passage as a block. Some material on the fire may have been drawn from the Annals, but the specifically Christian elements relating to the persecution could be Sulpicius' creation, or drawn from a Christian (or even, as outlined, a pagan) source or tradition, and then later taken from Sulpicius and inserted into the Annals some time before the 11th century, which is the time of the first extant manuscript (the Medicean II) containing Book 15. The centuries-long silence on the Annals and specifically on the Christian persecution supposedly contained in it makes this scenario a not unreasonable one, and there will be more to be said about it later. The ultimate bottom line is that the reference to Christ is the least secure thing of all, especially considering that it does not appear in Sulpicius, and could be an addition by a medieval scribe transplanting Sulpicius into Tacitus.

But as for the claim of forgery of the entire Annals in the Renaissance, there seems little reasonable basis for this. Besides, it is one matter to interpolate a sentence or paragraph and imitate the style of a previous author to a sufficient extent to achieve some success in deceiving readers; but it is surely another matter to forge an entire work and accomplish the same feat. The works of Tacitus have been studied for centuries now; his unique style has become familiar to generations of scholars. No one that I am aware of has perceived anomalies in the Annals in regard to style, structure or characterization. We have no reason to regard Poggio Bracciolini, or any other Renaissance writer, as a master forger capable of such an astonishing degree of imitation and deception. It can also be suggested that early Renaissance historiography was hardly advanced and sophisticated enough to discover or produce all the details found in the Annals. Moreover, are we to consider that Poggio ran out of inspiration for the

periods covered in the hiatuses? Would any forgery undertaken be likely to have been presented as incomplete? If it be maintained that this could have been a deliberate ploy to convey authenticity, would a Christian choose as one of those hiatuses to leave out all mention of Jesus in Annals 5? (I have personally not read Ross or Hochart, but it would be interesting to see what arguments they mounted in support of what seems to be an indefensible position.)

Drews, who wagers on Poggian authorship, is forced to reveal a hand which contains one very low card. In a footnote (p.47) he slips in an observation which shows how problematic the forgery position can be. If the Annals did not exist until the Renaissance, then the passage in Sulpicius is original to him; but it would have to have served as an essential source of certain 15:44 details, due to some close literary commonalities. According to Drews, Hochart pointed out that, while certain other works of Sulpicius were found in many medieval libraries, "there was only one manuscript of his *Chronicle*, probably of the eleventh century....Hence the work was almost unknown throughout the Middle Ages, and no one was aware of the reference in it to a Roman persecution of the Christians." But then comes an attempt to come up with an explanation for an attendant sticky problem: "It is noteworthy that Poggio Bracciolini seems by some lucky chance to have discovered and read this manuscript." Of course, there is no actual record that Poggio did have such a fortunate encounter.

The one point which Mendell does not address is the time and location of the first attestation to the presence of the Christ and Christians reference in Annals 15. (Not having been a New Testament scholar, Mendell shows no particular interest in 15:44.) One does assume—and Drews seems to state it as fact (p.47), drawing on Hochart—that the Medicean II, the earliest surviving manuscript of the latter Annals from the 11th century, contains it, and in a form which raises no suspicion of contemporary insertion. Mendell informs us that Paulinus Venetus (d. 1340) first shows knowledge of Medicean II and "cites Cornelius Tacitus and quotes without acknowledgment from Books 13-15" (p.236), but it would be helpful to know what those quotes are, and if they include 15:44. He tells us that the material in Medicean II, thanks to Boccaccio, became known to many others by 1400, mentioning that Jean de Montreuil by that time "was quoting Cornelius Tacitus on the plagues of Egypt." But was anyone quoting him on Christ and the Christians? If Sulpicius Severus could supposedly do it, why did no one before or after him, for several centuries? We should note, however, that the group of Renaissance manuscript hunters succeeding Boccaccio, while Christian, were 'humanist' scholars and not churchmen and may have felt no strong impulse to call special attention to whatever they found in Annals 15:44.

Earl Doherty



07-14-2008, 01:07 PM

mountainman

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Posts: 11,192



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**

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The text of Ross is available at www.gutenberg.org/etext/9098.

I have listed the contents [here](#) as follows:

Quote:

TACITUS AND BRACCIOLINI:
THE ANNALS FORGED IN THE 15th CENTURY
by JOHN WILSON ROSS (1818-1887)
Originally published anonymously in 1878.
Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.

Here is a brief sketch by way of a reproduction of the claims made at the index to the book:

BOOK ONE - TACITUS

CHAPTER I - TACITUS COULD BARELY HAVE WRITTEN THE ANNALS.

1. From the chronological point of view.
2. The silence preserved about that work by all writers till the fifteenth century.
3. The age of the MSS. containing the Annals.

CHAPTER II - A FEW REASONS FOR BELIEVING THE ANNALS TO BE A FORGERY.

1. The fifteenth century an age of imposture, shown in the invention of printing.
2. The curious discovery of the first six books of the Annals.
3. The blunders it has in common with all forged documents.
4. The Twelve Tables.
5. The Speech of Claudius in the Eleventh Book of the Annals.
6. Brutus creating the second class of nobility.

7. Camillus and his grandson.
8. The Marching of Germanicus.
9. Description of London in the time of Nero.
10. Labeo Antistius and Capito Ateius; the number of people executed for their attachment to Sejanus; and the marriage of Drusus, the brother of Tiberius, to the Elder Antonia.

CHAPTER III - SUSPICIOUS CHARACTER OF THE ANNALS FROM THE POINT OF TREATMENT.

1. Nature of the history.
2. Arrangement of the narrative.
3. Completeness in form.
4. Incongruities, contradictions and disagreements from the History of Tacitus.
5. Craftiness of the writer.
6. Subordination of history to biography.
7. The author of the Annals and Tacitus differently illustrate Roman history.
8. Characters and events corresponding to characters and events in the XVth century.
9. Greatness of the Author of the Annals.

CHAPTER IV - HOW THE ANNALS DIFFERS FROM THE HISTORY.

1. In the qualities of the writers; and why that difference.
2. In the narrative, and in what respect.
3. In style and language.
4. The reputation Tacitus has of writing bad Latin due to the mistakes of his imitator.

CHAPTER V - THE LATIN AND THE ALLITERATIONS IN THE ANNALS.

1. Errors in Latin, (_a_) on the part of the transcriber; (_b_) on the part of the writer.
2. Diction and Alliterations: Wherein they differ from those of Tacitus.

BOOK TWO - BRACCIOLINI.

CHAPTER I - BRACCIOLINI IN ROME.

1. His genius and the greatness of his age.
2. His qualifications.
3. His early career.

4. The character of Niccolo Niccoli, who abetted him in the forgery
5. Bracciolini's descriptive writing of the Burning of Jerome of Prague compared with the descriptive writing of the sham sea fight in the Twelfth Book of the Annals.

CHAPTER II - BRACCIOLINI IN LONDON.

1. Gaining insight into the darkest passions from associating with Cardinal Beaufort.
2. His passage about London in the Fourteenth Book of the Annals examined.
3. About the Parliament of England in the Fourth Book.

CHAPTER III - BRACCIOLINI SETTING ABOUT THE FORGERY OF THE ANNALS

1. The Proposal made in February, 1422, by a Florentine, named Lamberteschi, and backed by Niccoli.
2. Correspondence on the matter, and Mr. Shepherd's view that it referred to a Professorship refuted.
3. Professional disappointments in England determine Bracciolini to persevere in his intention of forging the Annals.
4. He returns to the Papal Secretaryship, and begins the forgery in Rome in October, 1423.

CHAPTER IV - BRACCIOLINI AS A BOOKFINDER

1. Doubts on the authenticity of the Latin, but not the Greek Classics.
2. At the revival of letters Popes and Princes offered large rewards for the recovery of the ancient classics.
3. The labours of Bracciolini as a bookfinder.
4. Belief put about by the professional bookfinders that MSS. were soonest found in obscure convents in barbarous lands.
5. How this reasoning throws the door open to fraud and forgery.
6. The bands of bookfinders consisted of men of genius in every department of literature and science.
7. Bracciolini endeavours to escape from forging the Annals by

forging the whole lost History of Livy.
 8. His Letter on the subject to Niccoli quoted, and examined.
 9. Failure of his attempt, and he proceeds with the forgery of the Annals.

BOOK THREE - THE LAST SIX BOOKS OF THE ANNALS.

CHAPTER I - THE CHARACTER OF BRACCIOLINI.

1. The audacity of the forgery accounted for by the mean opinion Bracciolini had of the intelligence of men.
2. The character and tone of the last Six Books of the Annals exemplified by what is said of Sabina Poppaea, Sagitta, Pontia and Messalina.
3. A few errors that must have proceeded from Bracciolini about the Colophonian Oracle of Apollo Clarius, the Household Gods of the Germans, Gotarzes, Bardanes and, above all, Nineveh.
4. The estimate taken of human nature by the writer of the Annals the same as that taken by Bracciolini.
5. The general depravity of mankind as shown in the Annals insisted upon in Bracciolini's Dialogue "De Infelicitate Principum".

CHAPTER II - THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

1. The intellect and depravity of the age.
2. Bracciolini as its exponent.
3. Hunter's accurate description of him.
4. Bracciolini gave way to the impulses of his age.
5. The Claudius, Nero and Tiberius of the Annals personifications of the Church of Rome in the fifteenth century.
6. Schildius and his doubts.
7. Bracciolini not covetous of martyrdom: communicates his fears to Niccoli.
8. The princes and great men in the Annals the princes and great men of the XVth century, not of the opening period of the Christian aera.
9. Bracciolini, and not Tacitus, a disparager of persons in high places.

CHAPTER III - FURTHER PROOFS OF FORGERY.

1. "Octavianus" as the name of Augustus Caesar.
2. Cumanus and Felix as joint governors of Judaea.
3. The blood relationship of Italians and Romans.
4. Fatal error in the *_oratio obliqua_*.
5. Mistake made about "locus".
6. Objections of some critics to the language of Tacitus examined.
7. Some improprieties that occur in the Annals found also in Bracciolini's works.
8. Instanced in (*_a_*) "nec--aut". (*_b_*) rhyming and the peculiar use of "pariter".
9. The harmony of Tacitus and the ruggedness of Bracciolini illustrated.
10. Other peculiarities of Bracciolini's not shared by Tacitus:
Two words terminating alike following two others with like terminations; prefixes that have no meaning; and playing on a single letter for alliterative purposes.

CHAPTER IV - THE TERMINATION OF THE FORGERY.

1. The literary merit and avaricious humour of Bracciolini.
2. He is aided in his scheme by a monk of the Abbey of Fulda.
3. Expressions indicating forgery.
4. Efforts to obtain a very old copy of Tacitus.
5. The forgery transcribed in the Abbey of Fulda.
6. First saw the light in the spring of 1429.

CHAPTER V - THE FORGED MANUSCRIPT.

1. Recapitulation, showing the certainty of forgery.
2. The Second Florence MS. the forged MS.
3. Cosmo de' Medici the man imposed upon.
4. Digressions about Cosmo de' Medici's position, and fondness for books, especially Tacitus.
5. The many suspicious marks of forgery about the Second Florence MS.; the Lombard characters; the attestation of Salustius.
6. The headings, and Tacitus being bound up with Apuleius, seem to connect Bracciolini with the forged MS.
7. The first authentic mention of the Annals.
8. Nothing invalidates the theory in this book.
9. Brief recapitulation of the whole argument.

BOOK FOUR - THE FIRST SIX BOOKS OF THE ANNALS.

CHAPTER I - REASONS FOR BELIEVING THAT BRACCIOLINI WROTE BOTH PARTS OF THE ANNALS.

1. Improvement in Bracciolini's means after the completion of the forgery of the last part of the Annals.
2. Discovery of the first six books, and theory about their forgery.
3. Internal evidence the only proof of their being forged.
4. Superiority of workmanship a strong proof.
5. Further departure than in the last six books from Tacitus's method another proof.
6. The symmetry of the framework a third proof.
7. Fourth evidence, the close resemblance in the openings of the two parts.
8. The same tone and colouring prove the same authorship.
9. False statements made about Sejanus and Antonius Natalis for the purpose of blackening Tiberius and Nero.
10. This spirit of detraction runs through Bracciolini's works.
11. Other resemblances denoting the same author.
12. Policy given to every subject another cause to believe both parts composed by a single writer.
13. An absence of the power to depict differences in persons and things.

CHAPTER II - LANGUAGE, ALLITERATION, ACCENT AND WORDS.

1. The poetic diction of Tacitus, and its fabrication in the Annals.
2. Florid passages in the Annals.
3. Metrical composition of Bracciolini.
4. Figurative words: (_a_) "pessum dare" (_b_) "voluntas"
5. The verb "foedere" and the Ciceronian use of "foedus".
6. The language of other Roman writers,--Livy, Quintus Curtius and Sallust.
7. The phrase "non modo--sed", and other anomalous expressions, not Tacitus's.
8. Words not used by Tacitus, "distinctus" and "codicillus"
9. Peculiar alliterations in the Annals and works of Bracciolini.
10. Monotonous repetition of accent on penultimate syllables.
11. Peculiar use of words: (_a_) "properus"

- (_b_) "annales" and "scriptura"
 (_c_) "totiens"
 12. Words not used by Tacitus: (_a_) "addubitare"
 (_b_) "extitere"
 13. Polysyllabic words ending consecutive sentences.
 14. Omissions of prepositions: (_a_) in. (_b_) with names of nations.

CHAPTER III - MISTAKES THAT PROVE FORGERY

1. The gift for the recovery of Livia.
2. Julius Caesar and the Pomoerium.
3. Julia, the wife of Tiberius.
4. The statement about her proved false by a coin.
5. Value of coins in detecting historical errors.
6. Another coin shows an error about Cornatus.
7. Suspicion of spuriousness from mention of the Quinquennale Ludicrum.
8. Account of cities destroyed by earthquake contradicted by a monument.
9. Bracciolini's hand shown by reference to the Plague.
10. Fawning of Roman senators more like conduct of Italians in the fifteenth century.
11. Same exaggeration with respect to Pomponia Graecina.
12. Wrong statement of the images borne at the funeral of Drusus.
13. Similar kind of error committed by Bracciolini in his "Varietate Fortunae".
14. Errors about the Red Sea.
15. About the Caspian Sea.
16. Accounted for.
17. A passage clearly written by Bracciolini.

CHAPTER THE LAST - FURTHER PROOFS OF BRACCIOLINI BEING THE AUTHOR OF THE FIRST SIX BOOKS OF THE ANNALS.

1. The descriptive powers of Bracciolini and Tacitus.
2. The different mode of writing of both.
3. Their different manners of digressing.
4. Two statements in the Fourth Book of the Annals that could not have been made by Tacitus.
5. The spirit of the Renaissance shown in both parts of the Annals.
6. That both parts proceeded from the same hand shown in the writer pretending to know the feelings of the characters in the narrative.

7. The contradictions in the two parts of the Annals and in the works of Bracciolini.
8. The Second Florence MS. a forgery.
9. Conclusion.

Another papal forgery? It's an odds on bet.

Best wishes

Pete Brown



07-14-2008, 01:23 PM

#3

[neilgodfrey](#)

Senior Member

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Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**

I'll preface it by saying that I do not subscribe to the Renaissance forgery theory, but my section on it entails a fuller study of the source used by Roger in support of his position, and it does have something to say toward the general issue of the Tacitean reference to Christ and Christians. (Please forgive me if I don't take the trouble to italicize all the appearances of book titles.)

Is this a reference to [Laupot's discussion](#) on Roger's page?

Thanks,
N



07-14-2008, 05:10 PM

#4

[EarlDoherty](#)

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
Location: Ontario, Canada
Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Neil**

Is this a reference to Laupot's discussion on Roger's page?

No, although I discuss Laupot's view in another part of the chapter, unrelated to any discussion of it by Roger, which I have not encountered.

It relates to Roger's arguments and listing of reasons (from Mendell) against the theory that the Annals is a Renaissance forgery. I found that listing and discussion of it a bit wanting, and so I did my own, which you see in my OP. I can't right at the moment locate that particular page in Roger's complex website, and can't remember how I originally found it--which is not helped by the fact that it's

past 2 AM here!

P.S. to Pete: Thanks for the info on Ross, but rather than giving us its long Index as proof of "papal forgery" of the Annals you might try to answer some of my arguments that such a forgery is not reasonable. Or did you mean that Ross was a papal forgery? (Humor there)

Earl Doherty



07-15-2008, 05:57 AM

#5

andrewcriddle

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004
Location: Birmingham UK
Posts: 4,876



IIUC the primary reference for the claim that Paulinus Venetus used Tacitus is K J Heilig *Wiener Studien* 53 (1935) pps 95ff
http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=J...s_brr=0&pgis=1

Andrew Criddle



07-15-2008, 06:19 AM

#6


andrewcriddle

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004
Location: Birmingham UK
Posts: 4,876



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 

*[indent]1. The first of those listed by Mendell (p.225f) relates to the Annals, but it is a shaky one. The geographer and astronomer Ptolemy in the middle of the second century lists towns along the northern shore of Germany. Two are given as (in Greek) "Phl̄eoum" and "**Siatoutanda**." Mendell says: "The latter name occurs nowhere else and has a dubious sound." In Annals 4:72-73, Tacitus is recounting the raising of the siege of the fortress of "Flevum" at the mouth of the Rhine by the Frisii. This matches the first town named by Ptolemy. For the second, Mendell (drawing on a German 1888 study) points to one of the sentences in that account. In Latin, the final phrase of it reads: "...et ad **sua tutanda** degressis rebellibus." In English: "[Apronius) threw (his forces) on the Frisii, raising at once the siege of the fortress] and dispersing the rebels in defence of their own possessions." Compare the words in bold. One must admire the search programs of 1888, but this seems somewhat bizarre, despite Mendell's claim that "The source of Ptolemy's mistake is obvious." A competent geographer invents a town on the German coast by reading a passage in Tacitus, finds two Latin words not referring to a town at all and mistakes and accepts them as a place name? If that is the extent of alleged references to the Annals that can be deduced in the first three centuries after it was written (and it seems to be), one may be forgiven for regarding the situation as desperate.*

The mistake by Ptolemy is more plausible than at first appears

"...et ad **sua tutanda** degressis rebellibus." reads at first sight as meaning *and dispersing the rebels towards **sua tutanda***

In fact *ad* is used here in its secondary meaning *for the purpose of* thus we read *and dispersing the rebels for the purpose of **defence of their own property***.

However someone who was a little weak in Latin might plausibly misunderstand **sua tutanda** as the place towards which the rebels dispersed.

Andrew Criddle



07-15-2008, 08:19 AM

#7

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
Location: Ontario, Canada
Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Andrew**

The mistake by Ptolemy is more plausible than at first appears

"...et ad sua tutanda degressis rebellibus." reads at first sight as meaning and dispersing the rebels towards sua tutanda

In fact ad is used here in its secondary meaning for the purpose of thus we read and dispersing the rebels for the purpose of defence of their own property.

However someone who was a little weak in Latin might plausibly misunderstand sua tutanda as the place towards which the rebels dispersed.

Yes, I did realize that this was the basis on which Mendell's source was postulating Ptolemy's misunderstanding. I also realized that the Tacitus passage happening to read like this is the only reason why such a postulation could be made.

But a geographer like Ptolemy (who presumably did not do all his geographizing from his armchair in the middle of some Greek enclave in Egypt) was surely widely traveled and knew enough Latin to be able to understand what the phrase actually meant. And if his Latin was weak, what was he doing reading Tacitus, and moreover relying on that weak reading to discover some hitherto unknown town in Germany?

If he was that inefficient, his work should be full of laughable errors. (Of course, he did say that the sun went around the earth...)

To postulate solely on the basis of this accident of wording

that Ptolemy did in fact make such a mistake is what I find bizarre, and a sign of desperation in seeking evidence for early knowledge of the Annals. Anything, of course, can be possible, but still...

Earl Doherty



07-15-2008, 10:40 AM

#8


mountainman

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2006
Location: Falls Creek, Oz.
Posts: 11,192



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
P.S. to Pete: Thanks for the info on Ross, but rather than giving us its long Index as proof of "papal forgery" of the Annals you might try to answer some of my arguments that such a forgery is not reasonable.

The era of the period 14th-15th-16th centuries was one in which forgery abounded and one which included the transition from handwritten documents to the printing press. How much **relative power** was in the hands of the people in self-appointed power of the publishing? To answer your questions you will need to gather a bunch of people together who have already researched that period, and ask them for a candid opinion.

Quote:

Or did you mean that Ross was a papal forgery?
(Humor there)

No. The popes were the sponsors (directly or indirectly) of centuries and centuries and centuries of forgeries and fraudulent misrepresentations of the historical truth for the benefit of their own designs for christendom.

Isn't it time to be equanimous about the evidence of forgery?

Best wishes,

Pete



07-15-2008, 02:34 PM

#9

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
Location: Ontario, Canada
Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **PeteBrown**
No. The popes were the sponsors (directly or

indirectly) of centuries and centuries and centuries of forgeries and fraudulent misrepresentations of the historical truth for the benefit of their own designs for christendom.

Isn't it time to be equanimous about the evidence of forgery?

Yes, but this does not guarantee that any one particular document is a forgery. Each case has to be examined, and I maintain that in the case of the Annals, such an examination does not allow for Renaissance forgery.

You still have not addressed the arguments in that particular case.

Earl Doherty



07-15-2008, 05:44 PM

#10

mountainman

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2006

Location: Falls Creek, Oz.

Posts: 11,192



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **PeteBrown**
No. The popes were the sponsors (directly or indirectly) of centuries and centuries and centuries of forgeries and fraudulent misrepresentations of the historical truth for the benefit of their own designs for christendom.

Isn't it time to be equanimous about the evidence of forgery?

Yes, but this does not guarantee that any one particular document is a forgery. Each case has to be examined, and I maintain that in the case of the Annals, such an examination does not allow for Renaissance forgery.

You still have not addressed the arguments in that particular case.

Ross had the reputation of being a very good classical scholar, and it is he who felt compelled to write a series of arguments against that particular case. The contents of this book - available online - indicate that he takes this issue seriously - specifically the Annals.

If you want to argue the case that it was not indeed a forgery the opportunity of refuting the detailed arguments of Ross would be the most expedient path. My research has been confined to the period before 400 CE and as such - aside from a preliminary listing in a thread entitled [an](#)

[index of fraud concerning "christian" history by century](#) I have confined my research to ancient history.

Best wishes,

Pete



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Is the Forgery of Tacitus' Annals in the Renaissance an Untenable Position?

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07-16-2008, 05:12 AM

#11

[andrewcriddle](#)

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004

Location: Birmingham UK

Posts: 4,876



I've come across an interesting defence of the authenticity of the Annals in Furneaux's edition (1896-1907) online <http://www.archive.org/details/annalsoftacitusp00taci>

The main section is roughly as follows

Quote:

GENUINENESS OF THE ANNALS.

IT his not hitherto been thought necessary for any editor of this work to establish its genuineness ; but the recent attempts to prove it to be a forgery by Poggio Bracciolini in the fifteenth century, while they cannot be said to have found such acceptance as to necessitate a full discussion , may make it desirable briefly to

subjoin some external evidence to show that it is at least the work of an ancient author.

We have no reason to suppose that any scholar of the time of Bracciolini had access to historians of this period who are lost to us. Even those whom we have must have been known to him only in manuscripts. The inventor of a Tacitean history of the principate of Tiberius or Nero must act as any scholar would now have to act who desired to compose a Tacitean history of that of Gaius or Domitian. He must make the best use of Dio Cassius and Suetonius, and of whatever could be gleaned from other authors, and must invent the rest of the material, as well as the form and language. Any careful comparison of the Annals with these sources will show how large a proportion of the whole narrative as it stands will have to be set down thus to invention ; and in testing such a theory, the details become important, almost in proportion to their intrinsic unimportance.

If it can be shown that even a moderate number of facts, such as would be unlikely to occur to an inventor, stated in the Annals, and in no other extant author, are confirmed by coins and inscriptions, most of which were certainly, and all of them probably, unknown in the fifteenth century ; the supposition of so many felicitous accidents will be generally conceded to pass the bounds of reasonable probability.

In the Books comprised in the first Medicean MS., the following confirmations, most of which are already well known to editors, will be found :

1. Germanicus is stated to have been augur , flamen , and imperator ; and all these titles are confirmed .

2. His eldest son Nero is stated to have been espoused to the daughter of Creticus Silanus . An inscription gives the name '#/a Silani [/. , sfion^sa Neronis Caes\aris\ .' .

3. The honours decreed to Germanicus at his death are enumerated , and in another place it is stated that those decreed to Drusus were in the main the same . The remains of tablets recording these decrees, though extremely fragmentary, appear to suggest confirmation of some of the details, such as the insertion of the name in the Salian hymn, the exhibition of the effigy at the ' Circenses,' and the erection of arches (Jani) at three different places .

4. L. Apronius, and P. Cornelius Dolabella, stated to have been at different times proconsuls of Africa , are shown to have been so by coins struck there under their permission . The same fact, and the year of office, are shown respecting L. Asprenas by an inscription . Another shows M'. Lepidus to have been proconsul of Asia .

5. It is stated that the tribunitian power, though never given to Germanicus, was afterwards given to Drusus, about a year before his death . This title, absent on all records of Germanicus, appears on coins of Drusus, but without record of more than a second year of office .

6. It is stated, that in the inscription of a statue dedicated by Julia Augusta to Augustus near the theatre of Marcellus, her name was placed before that of Tiberius . The Praenestine Calendar gives (with a date) the fact, and the locality of this dedication, and places the names in this order, thus apparently following the original inscription .

7. An inscription confirms the statement that Drusus, son of Germanicus, held the honorary office of praefectus urbi .

8. The statement, that Smyrna was chosen as the site of the temple to be erected by the cities of Asia to Tiberius, his mother, and the senate , is confirmed by a coin of that city, with a representation of the temple, and having all three names on the superscription .

9. The title of pontifex, given to L. Piso, better

known as praefectus urbi , is confirmed by the ' Acta Arvalium .'

10. The statement, that Theophanes of Mytilene had received divine honours from his countrymen , is confirmed by Mytilenaeen coins bearing his effigy, with the word THEOS added to his name .

A few instances of less direct confirmation may here be added :

1. A soldier named Rufus Helvius is mentioned as having received a civic crown ' . An inscription bears the name of ' M. Helvius Rufus Civica, prim(us) pil(us),' suggesting the assumption of a cognomen recording the distinction .

2. C. Silanus is stated to have had a sister, Torquata, ' priscae sanctimoniae virgo . ' Inscriptions mention 'Iunia, C. Stfant f., Torquata', as a Vestal virgin, and as chief of that body .

3. Julius Indus, one of the Treveri, is mentioned as in command of a ' delecta manus V subsequently called an 'ala . ' His name appears to suggest the origin of an ' ala Indiana ' mentioned in several inscriptions .

4. Caninius Gallus is mentioned as one of the quindecimviri, and as ' scientiae caerimoniarumque vetus Y a description suitable to a person who can be shown to have existed at that time, and to have been magister fratrum Arvalium V

Other instances might, no doubt, be added, but the above will probably be considered sufficient.

Another curious apparent confirmation will tend, if admitted, to carry back the date of these Books nearly to that of their reputed author. In the account of the Frisian rebellion occurs the sentence ' ad sua tutanda digressis rebellibus V Ptolemy, writing in the generation next to that of Tacitus, in his list of towns in north Germany inserts SIATOUTANDA as the name of a place ; which certainly looks as if he had the passage of the Annals before him, and misunder-

stood it.

In the later Books of the Annals, the principal inscription to be considered is that containing parts of the speech of Claudius, which indeed from its dissimilarity in many respects to that given in the Annals has been cited as evidence on the other side. It must here suffice to refer to the reasons shown elsewhere for thinking that the composition in the Annals was based on a knowledge of the original speech, though much freedom was used in dealing with it.

Whatever may be thought of this, there are other and more indisputable confirmations of statements found only in these Books, similar to those above noted in Books I-VI. We may ask from what source Bracciolini could have ascertained, or by what felicity he could have imagined that Cadius Rufus was governor of Bithynia , Eprius Matcellus of Lycia , Tarquilius Priscus of Bithynia , L. Antistius Vetus of Asia , that Clodius Quirinalis was ' praefectus classis ', and Gavius Silvanus tribune of a praetorian cohort , that Silanus had a daughter Lepida , that the names of Iulius Aquila , Sextius Africanus , Verulanus Severus , Funisulanus Vettonianus ' are names of persons employed in public service at a time agreeing with that of their mention. None of these facts could have been derived from any other literature known to us ; all are confirmed by coins or inscriptions of which Bracciolini and his contemporaries must have been ignorant .

It seems hardly worth while to pursue this subject further. If it is thus clear that the ' Annals ' must have been written in ancient times, when sources of information now lost to us were in existence, and are likely to have been written before the date of Ptolemy, we are entitled to quote the testimony of Jerome, that Tacitus did write, in thirty Books, the history of the whole period, or, as he expresses it, ' the lives of the Caesars,' from the death of Augustus to that of Domitian ; an arrangement of books answering to that of the second Medicean MS., which contains material purporting to be transcribed

from an original of the date A.D. 395, or contemporary with Jerome . Also on this view the resemblances in Sulpicius Severus , Ammianus , and other writers will rank as copies not as originals, and such knowledge of these Books as is shown in the Middle Ages becomes relevant , especially the grounds for thinking that a MS. answering generally in contents to the second Medicean was known to Boccaccio, who died before the birth of Bracciolini .

I've proofread a little but for an accurate version and the supporting references please go to the archive site linked above.

Andrew Criddle



07-16-2008, 09:43 AM

#12

andrewcriddle

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004

Location: Birmingham UK

Posts: 4,876



There is some material about the use of Tacitus by Paulinus Venetus here http://www.freidok.uni-freiburg.de/v...r_Germania.pdf
An automatic translation of the German gives this

Quote:

The Mediceus II has, however, in Monte Cassino in the 14th Century in the Franciscan Paulinus Venetus a topographically interested users had that one certainly not yet yielded the humanists can count the significantly different interested. Paulinus Venetus, Paulinus Mino Rita , was born to 1270/1274, and spent 1324 until his death 1344 Bishop of Pozzuoli. He has the Mediceus II despite the beneventanischen Written by the humanist Poggio not able to decipher, 42 apparently can read, he is in this Codex even with marginal notes immortalized. Even a century before him had a reader at several The bodies because of poor preparation of Pergaments verblässende Font of 11 Century nachgezogen.⁴³ The most comprehensive work of Paulinus Venetus is the Satyrice gestarum rerum, regum atque regnorum et summorum pontificum historia called world history. It is a large Opus with various attachments, whose final version likely to 1331 to date and has collected many, as the

adjective
 satyrica state, and thus any reader something.
 "The work was
 not for everybody's possession. Four copies there,
 says
 in a note today in Bamberg copy is unknown
 provenance:
 "This is a second, the Venice municipality, and a
 third has
 Robert King (the way of Naples, the country's Lord
 of the Bishop of
 Pozzuoli), through which he sent all the situation of
 their countries and
 Regions declared, as if he would have been why it
 on his
 Wisdom views on quite surprised and a fourth
 book, the Prague church. "45
 The annexes include a Mappa mundi, a
 Erdbeschreibung,
 scriptura and pictura, and in the scriptura is the
 section on Campania
 Tacitus quoted two brief passages with names -
 that's new - and ten
 rather long without naming author. Paulinus has
 Tacitus' 13, 14.und 15th Annals book
 herausgeschrieben those passages (and
 gleichzeitigim Mediceus II by Alien margin
 highlighted), based on Puteoli / Pozzuoli and the
 locations in the Gulf relating to Misenum, Bauli,
 Baiae, Cumae, Averner and Lucriner lake and the
 traces of Nero planned - fossa usque ad ostia
 Tiberina (Paulinus fossa Monti called Barbari
 undwohl channel identified with Agrippas, after his
 time, 1538, eruption durcheine the Monte Nuovo
 arise had spilled) .46 The use of Tacitus Paulinus is
 determined -- quite closely and be limited - that
 on a region-related interest, and there is the inter-
 eat Rudolph of similar Fulda

42 Poggio Bracciolini, *Humanities I: Lettere a Niccolò Niccoli*, ed Helene Harth (Florence 1984)
 No 30 (21.10.1427) 83.

43 Lowe (as in n. 15) with Anna-table 38.

44 Dorothee by the Brinken, *Mappa mundi and Cosmographia*, in *German archive* 24 (1968) 118-186, 154-156 here; Isabelle Heullant-Donat, *Entrer dans l'histoire. Paolino da Venezia et les prologues de ses chroniques universal*, *Melanges de l'cole Frafflise deRome. Moyen-äge* 105 (1993) 381-442 (called all manuscripts); this., *From Origine Mundi. Fra Elemosina e Paolino da Venezia. Italy Franciscains Deux et l'histoire pour le universal auXIVe doctorat s-lettres*, 3 Vols. (Paris, 1994) .

45 Konrad Josef Heilig, a contribution to the history of Mediceus II of Tacitus, in *Vienna study diene* 53 (1935) 95-110, here 104, n. 23

46 Karl Julius Beloch, *Campania [1] topography, history and life of the environment in Nea-pels Alterthum* (Berlin 1879) 170

Andrew Criddle



07-16-2008, 11:08 AM

#13

mountainman

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2006

Location: Falls Creek, Oz.

Posts: 11,192



This article by Carrier might prove relevant: [Argument to Ahistoricity](#)

The way the question is presented "Is the Forgery of Tacitus' Annals in the Renaissance an Untenable Position?" it is amenable to be seen as the argument to the historicity or ahistoricity (ie: forgery) of Tacitus.

Quote:

There are two ways to "prove" ahistoricity:

(1) If you can demonstrate that there is both (a) insufficient evidence to believe x and (b) sufficient evidence to disbelieve x, then it is reasonable to disbelieve x. This is the "Argument from Silence."

(2) If you can demonstrate that all the evidence can be far better accounted for by a theory (y) other than historicity (theory x), then it is reasonable to believe y and, consequently, to disbelieve x. This is the "Argument to the Best Explanation."

I understand in this instance we seek to prove historicity. The question is does the same framework of logic for ahistoricity (above) work for historicity as well? Or, do the arguments of Ross (for the ahistoricity of Tacitus Annals in this instance) fit this framework? I think they do

Best wishes,

Pete



07-16-2008, 03:37 PM

#14

spamandham

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2004

Location: Dallas, TX

Posts: 11,525



I am completely ignorant on this subject. If someone who is knowledgeable cares to elucidate....

What is the earliest copy of Annals, or reference to portions of it (not just references to Tacitus, but unequivocal references to Annals), that has been carbon dated?

Without that, it seems it boils down to an argument of how good a Renaissance forger could reasonably be (damn good if the shroud of Turin is used as an example!), and the 'likelihood' of abject forgery vs. traditional historical layering. Once sufficient evidence of forgery has been

introduced, only radiometric dating will suffice.

For example, a Renaissance forger could be so familiar with textual style to pass a paleographical test, but not familiar enough to pass analysis' of a particular author's style, which requires modern computational tools.



07-17-2008, 01:49 PM

#15

Toto

Contributor

Join Date: Jun 2000
Location: Los Angeles area
Posts: 40,549



The tangent on whether Ross was a good classicist or not has been split off [here](#).

Please stay on topic.



07-18-2008, 01:03 AM

#16

Jeffrey Gibson

Veteran Member

Join Date: Nov 2007
Location: Chicago, IL
Posts: 3,058



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Toto**
The tangent on whether Ross was a good classicist or not has been split off [here](#).

Please stay on topic.

I hate to disagree with you, but the question of Ross' reputation and whether or not Ross was a good classicist *is very much on topic*. The claim that Ross' "scholarship" in matters Classical was well regarded is, after all, the basis *and buttress* of Pete's "argument" that what Ross says vis a vis Tacitus not only should/ought be taken seriously, but is the definitive and final word on the matter.

Jeffrey



07-18-2008, 01:16 AM

#17

gstafleu

Veteran Member

Join Date: Jan 2006
Location: London, Ontario, Canada
Posts: 1,719



Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham**
For example, a Renaissance forger could be so familiar with textual style to pass a paleographical test, but not familiar enough to pass analysis' of a particular author's style, which requires modern computational tools.

It is not just a matter of style. As has been pointed out above, it seems that the Annals contain items with which a renaissance forger could (reasonably speaking) not have been familiar (only modern research has unearthed them). If I understand correctly that this is indeed the case, then

the argument for forgery seems weak.

Gerard Stafleu



07-18-2008, 02:10 AM

#18

Roger Pearse

Veteran Member

Join Date: Apr 2002
Location: N/A
Posts: 4,370



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Jeffrey Gibson**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Toto**

The tangent on whether Ross was a good classicist or not has been split off [here](#).

Please stay on topic.

I hate to disagree with you, but the question of Ross' reputation and whether or not Ross was a good classicist is very much on topic. The claim that Ross' "scholarship" in matters Classical was well regarded is, after all, the basis and buttress of Pete's "argument" that what Ross says vis a vis Tacitus not only should/ought be taken seriously, but is the definitive and final word on the matter.

It is a separable question, tho, so I think Toto was right to split it. But of course the outcome of that thread does bear on this one.

All the best,

Roger Pearse



07-18-2008, 02:56 AM

#19

Toto

Contributor

Join Date: Jun 2000
Location: Los Angeles area
Posts: 40,549



Please focus your comments here on Doherty's OP, not on a side comment about Ross that Pete can't seem to support.

Ross was a 19th century writer; he learned Greek and Latin when those were part of the standard higher education, but clearly he lacks the tools of 20th century scholarship. It is not clear what difference his reputation would make to the argument.



07-18-2008, 04:29 AM

#20

Jeffrey Gibson

Veteran Member

Join Date: Nov 2007



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Toto**

Location: Chicago, IL
 Posts: 3,058

Please focus your comments here on Doherty's OP, not on a side comment about Ross that Pete can't seem to support.

Seem???

Quote:

Ross was a 19th century writer; he learned Greek and Latin when those were part of the standard higher education, but clearly he lacks the tools of 20th century scholarship.

According to his reviewers (including, it appears, Hochart), he lacked the tools of 19th century scholarship as well

Quote:

It is not clear what difference his reputation would make to the argument.

Wasn't/weren't Earl's OP and a number of his claims within it ultimately grounded -- through Drews - in **J.W.** (not W.R. as Earl notes) Ross' "scholarship"?

CF. "The current strength of our 'urban legend' proceeds from the end of the 19th century in two books by W. R. Ross and P. Hochart."

And if Ross' "scholarship" was as bad as reviewers of his works have noted, then aren't any claims based upon and/or grounded in that "scholarship" both as credulous as they are worthless?

Jeffrey



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Greetings neilgodfrey,

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07-18-2008, 05:53 AM

#21

Toto

Contributor

Join Date: Jun 2000
Location: Los Angeles area
Posts: 40,549



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Jeffrey Gibson** [▶](#)

...

Quote:

It is not clear what difference his reputation would make to the argument.

*Wasn't/weren't Earl's OP and a number of his claims within it ultimately grounded -- through Drews - in **J.W.** (not W.R. as Earl notes) Ross' "scholarship"?*

I'm not sure if you read or understood the OP. Earl is **opposing** the idea that Tacitus' *Annals* is a Renaissance forgery, but with different reasoning from Roger Pearse.

He does not endorse either Ross or Drews, and indicated that he had not read Ross, and would only be interested in reading Ross to see how urban legends spread.



07-18-2008, 06:36 AM

#22

Jeffrey Gibson

Veteran Member

Join Date: Nov 2007
Location: Chicago, IL
Posts: 3,058



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Toto**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Jeffrey Gibson**

...

*Wasn't/weren't Earl's OP and a number of his claims within it ultimately grounded -- through Drews - in **J.W.** (not W.R. as Earl notes) Ross' "scholarship"?*

*I'm not sure if you read or understood the OP. Earl is **opposing** the idea that Tacitus' Annals is a Renaissance forgery, but with different reasoning from Roger Pearse. He does not endorse either Ross or Drews, and indicated that he had not read Ross, and would only be interested in reading Ross to see how urban legends spread.*

Got it. But backhandedly, this still shows that the question of how good Ross' scholarship was is a relevant issue for the OP and precisely for the reasons I stated.

Jeffrey



07-18-2008, 06:41 AM

#23

Toto

Contributor

Join Date: Jun 2000
Location: Los Angeles area
Posts: 40,549



Let's assume that mountainman was talking through his hat, or just assumed incorrectly that anyone who could read an ancient language qualified as a good scholar. There's no need to beat this point into the ground.

Ross is not especially relevant except possibly as a source for the idea that Doherty and Pearse both oppose.

I think that Earl posted this here for feedback.



07-18-2008, 11:11 AM

#24

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Toto**

Location: Ontario, Canada
Posts: 1,435

I'm not sure if you read or understood the OP. Earl is opposing the idea that Tacitus' Annals is a Renaissance forgery, but with different reasoning from Roger Pearse. He does not endorse either Ross or Drews, and indicated that he had not read Ross, and would only be interested in reading Ross to see how urban legends spread.

You'll have to forgive Jeffrey for not reading my OP, Toto. Once he saw that I got Ross's initials wrong, that meant that nothing I could have said in that OP would have been worth reading any further. 😊

Earl Doherty



07-18-2008, 11:22 AM

#25


mountainman

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2006
Location: Falls Creek, Oz.
Posts: 11,192



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Toto** 
Let's assume that mountainman was talking through his hat, or just assumed incorrectly that anyone who could read an ancient language qualified as a good scholar. There's no need to beat this point into the ground.

Ross is not especially relevant except possibly as a source for the idea that Doherty and Pearse both oppose.

I think that Earl posted this here for feedback.

That's what I thought and that's why I posted the reference to the source document cited, authored by Ross **which I had read** and which I had made a summary of the contents.

Are we not here to deal with the source rather than the messenger? Ross states the reasons he felt compelled to write up a thesis in which he finds forgery as the basis for texts we have named as the Annals of Tacitus. Why dont these reasons get listed? Surely these reasons will tell us why Ross thought that the Forgery of Tacitus' Annals in the Renaissance is certainly not an Untenable Position? The academic derision of the presence of forgery is unjustified by the similar patterns of facts in history. Forgery is a very real political reality which academics and academic treatments often euphemise under the carpet.

Best wishes

Pete



07-18-2008, 12:10 PM

#26

Jeffrey Gibson

Veteran Member

Join Date: Nov 2007
 Location: Chicago, IL
 Posts: 3,058



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Toto**

I'm not sure if you read or understood the OP. Earl is opposing the idea that Tacitus' Annals is a Renaissance forgery, but with different reasoning from Roger Pearse. He does not endorse either Ross or Drews, and indicated that he had not read Ross, and would only be interested in reading Ross to see how urban legends spread.

You'll have to forgive Jeffrey for not reading my OP, Toto. Once he saw that I got Ross's initials wrong, that meant that nothing I could have said in that OP would have been worth reading any further. 😊

Earl Doherty

That's one indication. :devil3:

Jeffrey



07-18-2008, 12:16 PM

#27

mountainman

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2006
 Location: Falls Creek, Oz.
 Posts: 11,192



To repeat the link from the other thread ...

[Review of Ross](#)

Here are its concluding proclamations

Quote:

We have examined this curious volume in considerable detail, not because we are at all convinced by it, or that we doubt the authenticity of the ' Annals ' of Tacitus, but because it exemplifies in a striking manner the sceptical tendency of the age to attack the authenticity of ancient writers.

In our judgment, the argument of Mr. Koss against the proper authorship of Tacitus is at least as plausible and ingenious as any of the recent attempts which have been made to shake the authority of the Fourth Gospel ;

and if a similar catena of objections could be urged against any of the books of the canon of Scripture, we should probably be told that criticism had achieved a signal triumph over theological traditions. The truth is, that in such questions the probability lies on the side of long tradition, and it requires stronger evidence than this volume contains to shake it.

Whoever is the author of this review is saying that his work is to be compared to **any of the recent attempts which have been made to shake the authority of the Fourth Gospel** .

Who were these contemporaries being cited?
And what are these works?
And what is the qualification of the author of the review?

Best wishes,

Pete



07-18-2008, 03:30 PM

#28

[spamandham](#)

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2004
Location: Dallas, TX
Posts: 11,525



Quote:

Originally Posted by [gstafleu](#)

Quote:

Originally Posted by [spamandham](#)
For example, a Renaissance forger could be so familiar with textual style to pass a palaeographical test, but not familiar enough to pass analysis' of a particular author's style, which requires modern computational tools.

It is not just a matter of style. As has been pointed out above, it seems that the Annals contain items with which a renaissance forger could (reasonably speaking) not have been familiar (only modern research has unearthed them). If I understand correctly that this is indeed the case, then the argument for forgery seems weak.

Gerard Stafleu

I suppose you could argue a later forger might have based his forgery off of an actual earlier text that had such information in it, but that certainly would be grasping at straws without something to base the claim on.



07-19-2008, 11:54 AM

#29

Simonmagus

Junior Member

Join Date: Jul 2008

Location: Calgary Alberta
Canada

Posts: 5



I've read Ross' work and personally I believe his arguments require far too much in the way of assumption and shaky interpretation to be tenable. I'm not sure who else has noticed it, but Ross' agenda seemed more of an attack on Christianity, with the *Annals* representing nothing short of collateral damage.

He seemed to regard the *Annals* as a forgery due to it crossing through the hands of the Christian church, but his supporting evidence of it being a forgery is not strong by any means, and requires the reader to submit to weakly substantiated theories and a whole lot of hoopla.

Honestly, his work only seemed to be more of an attack on Christianity than the *Annals*, with an agenda designed to seemingly discredit *Annals* as merely a means of attacking the church.

I could not escape the idea that Ross harbored a deep-rooted disdain for religion in general, and of anything connected to religion. I'd have to conclude that the man was a militant type atheist who reached so far to the left that he simply became unbelievable.



07-20-2008, 04:54 AM

#30

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005

Location: Ontario, Canada

Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Jeffrey**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**
You'll have to forgive Jeffrey for not reading my OP, Toto. Once he saw that I got Ross's initials wrong, that meant that nothing I could have said in that OP would have been worth reading any further.

That's one indication....

...of a very transparent technique Jeffrey has of focusing on an insignificant error as a means of avoiding engaging with the meat of a matter, something that might require actual counter-arguments of substance.

Of course, in this case, no one would expect Jeffrey to argue against my position and defend Renaissance forgery of the Annals, but I realize that once one gets into the habit of something, it's hard to break.

Incidentally, I'm disappointed that Roger hasn't weighed in on this thread, perhaps to comment on some of the points that might be seen as affecting issues broader than the specific question of Renaissance forgery, such as why there is such silence on the Annals in Christian circles if it contained the passage in 15:44. Sulpicius Severus is a puzzling lone voice, open to other interpretations in his relationship with our extant Annals passage.

Earl Doherty



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Is the Forgery of Tacitus' Annals in the Renaissance an Untenable Position?

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The FRDB Archive

Greetings neilgodfrey,

The conversion of the existing archive is not scheduled as of yet. I am looking into a few open source options for the conversion ([phpBB](#), [myBB](#), and [FluxBB](#)). Until that is completed, the current archive will remain available to members.

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07-20-2008, 05:04 AM

#31

Simonmagus

Junior Member

Join Date: Jul 2008
Location: Calgary Alberta
Canada
Posts: 5



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**

Incidentally, I'm disappointed that Roger hasn't weighed in on this thread, perhaps to comment on some of the points that might be seen as affecting issues broader than the specific question of Renaissance forgery, such as why there is such silence on the Annals in Christian circles if it contained the passage in 15:44. Sulpicius Severus is a puzzling lone voice, open to other interpretations in his relationship with our extant Annals passage.

Earl Doherty

Hello Mr. Doherty.

To me, it seemed quite obvious why Christians might avoid the Tacitus passage. It doesn't seem to be something a Christian would want to quote with how Tacitus portrayed the Christians as criminals and with false beliefs.

Also, we really don't see a whole lot of chances in Christian antiquity for those verses to be quoted, since most of the writings for the era don't really call for any good reason to quote Tacitus. With the limited number of chances to quote it, along with the possibility that early persecuted Christians may very well have avoided contact (including visiting Roman libraries to read Tacitus) with the Romans during Tacitus' time as a means of survival, I think we can see many legitimate reasons why those verses were not mentioned, in my opinion.



07-20-2008, 06:24 AM

#32

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
Location: Ontario, Canada
Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **simon**

To me, it seemed quite obvious why Christians might avoid the Tacitus passage. It doesn't seem to be something a Christian would want to quote with how Tacitus portrayed the Christians as criminals and with false beliefs.

This is a lot like the oft-cited reason why Christians before Eusebius did not quote Josephus' Testimonium, but in neither case does this explanation stand up to closer scrutiny. I will quote from my draft of the new Tacitus chapter for my book, though this is just an introduction to a very detailed look at the silent record on 15:44 in three centuries of Christian writings. But it will give you the basic answer that I think you are overlooking...

Quote:

Another Strange Silence

The most prominent is akin to the situation in regard to Josephus' Testimonium: no Christian writer makes mention of this passage in Tacitus for at least three centuries. Why should we expect such mention? For one thing, it would constitute a reference to Jesus by a pagan writer, of which there were precious few in the first couple of centuries. But also, for the simple reason that through those first few centuries Christians were fixated on the problem of persecution, its injustice but also its fascination. So great was this fascination that a host of writings were produced recounting the martyrdoms of this and that figure in early church history, from Peter and Paul and other apostles, to Ignatius and Polycarp, and far beyond. Modern scholarship has come to judge that this picture was vastly exaggerated for the

period prior to Diocletian (late 3rd century) on the eve of Christianity's triumph, and that traditions about persecution for the very early period are thoroughly unreliable. The existence of persecution became for Christians an apologetic argument for the veracity of the faith. In the words of Joseph McCabe (The Popes and their Church2):

Quote:

"According to the Catholic writers, and even the official liturgy of their Church, the Roman community of the first three centuries was so decked and perfumed with saints and martyrs that it must have had a divine spirit in it. Now the far greater part, the overwhelmingly greater part, of the Acts of the Martyrs and Lives of the Saints on which this claim is based are impudent forgeries, perpetrated by Roman Christians from the fourth to the eighth century in order to give a divine halo to the very humble, and very human, history of their Church."

So extreme did they strike later Christian observers that much of this literature was denounced as simple fabrication, even by churchmen. As McCabe says, "many of these forgeries were already notorious in the year 494, when Pope Gelasius timidly and haltingly condemned them."³

Thus, there was every reason for Christian writers to appeal to the Tacitus passage to highlight what should have been the prime example of early persecution by the Roman authorities. Nor should it be claimed that such writers might not have been aware of Tacitus' writings. Drews (op.cit., p.27) lists "Christian writers who are acquainted with Tacitus, such as Tertullian, Jerome, Orosius, Sidonius Apollinaris, Sulpicius Severus, and Cassiodorus." If, on the contrary side, defenders argue that the Annals of Tacitus were known throughout the centuries in order to counter the claim of later forgery for the work or even of interpolation of the book 15 passage, then they must face squarely the problem of the lack of Christian reference to it in the early period.

Tertullian

Tertullian is a case in point....

Earl Doherty



Roger Pearse

Veteran Member

Join Date: Apr 2002

Location: N/A

Posts: 4,370



d) Tacitus read in Campania.

However the Mediceus II in Montecassino in the 14th century found a user interested in topography, the Franciscan Paulinus Venetus. He cannot be certainly reckoned among the humanists, who no doubt were otherwise interested.

Paulinus Venetus, also named Paulinus Minorita was born around 1270/1274 and was bishop of Pozzuoli from 1324 to his death in 1344. He obviously could read the Mediceus II, despite the beneventan script which the humanist Poggio was unable to decipher [42], leaving his mark in the Codex in marginal notes. A century earlier a reader had already found in several places that the 11th century writing was fading because of the unsatisfactory preparation of the parchment.[43]

The most extensive work of Paulinus Venetus is the world history named the "Satyrice gestarum rerum, regum atque regnorum et summorum pontificum historia". This was a substantial work with various appendices, whose final version is probably to be dated to 1331 and which gathers various materials, as the adjective satyrice suggests, and thus brings something for every reader. The work was certainly not intended for the possession of every man. Four copies contain it; a note in the copy of unknown provenance today in Bamberg says: "The municipality of Venice has a second copy of this text, and King Robert (of Naples, the feudal lord of the bishop of Pozzuoli) possesses a third, with the help of which he explains to every envoy the situation of his countries and regions, as if he had been there, at which they are truly surprised at his wisdom; the church of Prague possess a fourth book." [45] In the appendices are a Mappa mundi, an description of the earth, in writing and as a picture, and in writing in the section over Campania Tacitus is quoted: in two short passages by name "this is again" and ten rather long partially accurate without naming the author. Paulinus has copied from Tacitus' 13th and 14th book extracts of the "Germania" of Tacitus from the German humanists [53] and copied those passages from the 15th book of the "Annals" (and at the same time emphasized in the Mediceus II by marginal notes), which refer to Puteoli / Pozzuoli and the locations at the gulf: of Misenum, Bauli, Baiae, Cumae, the Averne and Lucrine lakes and the traces of the fossa usque ad ostia Tiberina planned by Nero (Paulinus calls the fossa Montis Barbari and probably identified it with Agrippa's channel, that was only buried after his time, 1538, by an eruption from Monte Nuovo). [46] The use of Tacitus by Paulinus is thus certain - and quite strictly limited - to the references of interest to a particular region; in this he is similar to the interest of Rudolf of Fulda.



07-20-2008, 07:07 AM

#34



EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005

Location: Ontario, Canada

Posts: 1,435

It's nice to see you join in, Roger. But I'm not sure what your post is meant to demonstrate. (Edit: OK, use of Annals B.P.--"Before Poggio"; I was focusing on the more specific question I just raised about the authenticity of 15:44, which is my point of interest.) Existence of the later Annals by the 14th century is not hanging entirely on the witness of Venetus. But as far as I can see, Venetus did not quote 15:44. However, I'm not trying to make that necessarily meaningful, as we're assuming that Medicean II contained it, though it would help to know just exactly when the first quote from that chapter's references to Christ and the Christians can be found in Renaissance (or later) Christian writings.

Earl Doherty



07-20-2008, 08:22 AM

#35

Simonmagus

Junior Member

Join Date: Jul 2008

Location: Calgary Alberta

Canada

Posts: 5



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** [▶](#)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **simon**

To me, it seemed quite obvious why Christians might avoid the Tacitus passage. It doesn't seem to be something a Christian would want to quote with how Tacitus portrayed the Christians as criminals and with false beliefs.

This is a lot like the oft-cited reason why Christians before Eusebius did not quote Josephus' Testimonium, but in neither case does this explanation stand up to closer scrutiny. I will quote from my draft of the new Tacitus chapter for my book, though this is just an introduction to a very detailed look at the silent record on 15:44 in three centuries of Christian writings. But it will give you the basic answer that I think you are overlooking...

Quote:

Another Strange Silence

The most prominent is akin to the situation in regard to Josephus' Testimonium: no Christian writer makes mention of this passage in Tacitus for at least three centuries. Why should we expect such mention? For one thing, it would constitute a reference to Jesus by a pagan writer, of which there were precious few in the first couple of centuries. But also, for the simple reason that through those first few centuries Christians were fixated on the

problem of persecution, its injustice but also its fascination. So great was this fascination that a host of writings were produced recounting the martyrdoms of this and that figure in early church history, from Peter and Paul and other apostles, to Ignatius and Polycarp, and far beyond. Modern scholarship has come to judge that this picture was vastly exaggerated for the period prior to Diocletian (late 3rd century) on the eve of Christianity's triumph, and that traditions about persecution for the very early period are thoroughly unreliable. The existence of persecution became for Christians an apologetic argument for the veracity of the faith. In the words of Joseph McCabe (*The Popes and their Church*2):

On the surface this may seem like a decent argument, until we recognize that there really isn't any comparison between what Tacitus wrote and what Josephus wrote. Josephus has obviously been interpolated, to what extent, we are not certain. The difference between Josephus and Tacitus is obvious; we have Josephus writing a flattering report regarding Christ and the Christians, but not so with Tacitus. Based on that alone, I would not attempt to compare them for the sake of your argument. There's just too many variables that will attack an argument like that, which puts you on the defensive immediately.

Another problem that I see is that you seem to believe that a supposed Jewish messiah such as Jesus would be respected enough by pagan writers to warrant mention. If we take what we have in regards to historical documents, we really don't see much in the way of any kind of long list of pagan writers who would have much of a good reason to write anything about Jesus. Perhaps you should post a list of the pagan writers which you believe should have mentioned Jesus in their writings? I really don't know of any personally, but that could be just my own ignorance.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**
Thus, there was every reason for Christian writers to appeal to the Tacitus passage to highlight what should have been the prime example of early persecution by the Roman authorities. Nor should it be claimed that such writers might not have been aware of Tacitus' writings. Drews (op.cit., p.27) lists "Christian writers who are acquainted with Tacitus, such as Tertullian, Jerome, Orosius, Sidonius Apollinaris, Sulpicius Severus, and Cassiodorus." If, on the contrary side, defenders argue that the Annals of Tacitus were known throughout the centuries in order to counter the claim of later forgery for the work or even of

interpolation of the book 15 passage, then they must face squarely the problem of the lack of Christian reference to it in the early period.

Tertullian

Tertullian is a case in point...

Earl Doherty

I'm certain that most scholars will agree, including yourself, that we have but a fraction of the early writings regarding this subject, and in my opinion we are lucky to have anything at all written about this Jesus character.

Yet, with Tertullian, we do find some evidence which does seem to correspond with what was written in the Annals. For in Chapter V of his Apology, we see this reference -

Quote:

Consult your histories; you will there find that Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect, making profess then especially at Rome. But we glory in having our condemnation hallowed by the hostility of such a wretch. For any one who knows him, can understand that not except as being of singular excellence did anything bring on it Nero's condemnation.

Tertullian does indicate that a Roman history of the persecution of Christians by Nero existed. All the elements that we see above are found only in the Annals, and it would be interesting indeed if the Annals was actually a part of Tacitus' *Histories* as suspected, and we capitalized the word "histories" above.

Tertullian's apology is speaking to a Roman, and telling that Roman to consult his historical records. I can find no other historical record whereas Nero persecuted Christians and made them profess their faith/guilt/whatever in Rome other than what we see in the Annals.

It is a curious and interesting view which does have support. Therefore, I wouldn't want to say Tertullian is actually silent about it, not when we can see evidence to the contrary.



07-20-2008, 04:59 PM

#36

mountainman

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2006

Location: Falls Creek, Oz.

Posts: 11,192



There is also the question of the value of the input from the work of (hello Jeffrey) a good classical scholar Arthur Drews (1912). In his work [Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus](#) Drews presents the case that the evidence for the historicity of any relationship between the emperor Nero

and any "purportedly existent christians" does not in fact have any support.

Quote:

It is clear that we have here no reference to the per-secution of the Christians under Nero. It is not even stated that the apostles named met with a violent death on account of their faith, as the word " martyresas " (" after rendering his testimony ") need not by any means be understood to mean a testimony of blood, because the word " martyr " originally means only a witness to the truth of the Christian faith in the general sense, and is equivalent to " confessor," and was only later applied to those who sealed their faith by a violent death. 2 If the expression in the above text is usually taken to refer to

1 Neutestamentl. Apokryphen, edited by Hennecke, 1904, ch. v.

2 See Hochart, Etudes au Sujet de la Persecution des Chretiens sous Neron, 1885.

THE ROMAN WITNESSES 29

the execution of the apostles under Nero, it is not because Clemens says anything about this execution, but merely because, according to Christian tradition, Peter and Paul are supposed to have been put to death at the time of the Neronian persecution. This tradition, however, is not only relatively late, but extremely doubtful in itself. That Peter was never in Eome, and so did not meet his end there under Nero, must be regarded as certain after the research of Lipsius.

Final note. Arthur Drews footnotes [Antiqua Mater, a study of Christian origins \(1887\)](#)

Best wishes,

Pete



07-21-2008, 12:36 AM

#37

andrewcridle

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004
Location: Birmingham UK
Posts: 4,876



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Roger Pearse** 
d) *Tacitus read in Campania.*

However the Mediceus II in Montecassino in the 14th century found a user interested in topography, the Franciscan Paulinus Venetus. He cannot be certainly reckoned among the humanists, who no doubt were otherwise interested.

Paulinus Venetus, also named Paulinus Minorita was born around 1270/1274 and was bishop of Pozzuoli from 1324 to his death in 1344. He obviously could read the Mediceus II, despite the beneventan script which the humanist Poggio was unable to decipher [42], leaving his mark in the Codex in marginal notes. A century earlier a reader had already found in several places that the 11th century writing was fading because of the unsatisfactory preparation of the parchment.[43]

The most extensive work of Paulinus Venetus is the world history named the "Satyrica gestarum rerum, regum atque regnorum et summorum pontificum historia". This was a substantial work with various appendices, whose final version is probably to be dated to 1331 and which gathers various materials, as the adjective satyrica suggests, and thus brings something for every reader. The work was certainly not intended for the possession of every man. Four copies contain it; a note in the copy of unknown provenance today in Bamberg says: "The municipality of Venice has a second copy of this text, and King Robert (of Naples, the feudal lord of the bishop of Pozzuoli) possesses a third, with the help of which he explains to every envoy the situation of his countries and regions, as if he had been there, at which they are truly surprised at his wisdom; the church of Prague possess a fourth book." [45] In the appendices are a Mappa mundi, an description of the earth, in writing and as a picture, and in writing in the section over Campania Tacitus is quoted: in two short passages by name "this is again" and ten rather long

partially accurate without naming the author. Paulinus has copied from Tacitus' 13th and 14th book extracts of the "Germania" of Tacitus from the German humanists [53] and copied those passages from the 15th book of the "Annals" (and at the same time emphasized in the Mediceus II by marginal notes), which refer to Puteoli / Pozzuoli and the locations at the gulf: of Misenum, Bauli, Baiae, Cumae, the Averne and Lucrine lakes and the traces of the fossa usque ad ostia Tiberina planned by Nero (Paulinus calls the fossa Montis Barbari and probably identified it with Agrippa's channel, that was only buried after his time, 1538, by an eruption from Monte Nuovo).[46] The use of Tacitus by Paulinus is thus certain - and quite strictly limited - to the references of interest to a particular region; in this he is similar to the interest of Rudolf of Fulda.

Hi Roger thanks for this.

One point: in the part

Quote:

Paulinus has copied from Tacitus' 13th and 14th book **extracts of the "Germania" of Tacitus from the German humanists [53]** and copied those passages from the 15th book of the "Annals" (and at the same time emphasized in the Mediceus II by marginal notes), which

I think you may have inadvertently got a heading mixed up with the main text (the phrase I've bolded) I would translate

Quote:

Paulinus has copied from Tacitus' 13th and 14th and 15th book of the "Annals", (and at the same time emphasized in the Mediceus II by marginal notes), those passages which

Andrew Criddle



07-21-2008, 12:42 AM

#38

[andrewcriddle](#)

Veteran Member


Join Date: Sep 2004

Location: Birmingham UK

Posts: 4,876



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
Incidentally, I'm disappointed that Roger hasn't weighed in on this thread, perhaps to comment on some of the points that might be seen as affecting issues broader than the specific question of Renaissance forgery, such as why there is such silence on the Annals in Christian circles if it contained the passage in 15:44. Sulpicius Severus is a puzzling lone voice, open to other interpretations in his relationship with our extant

Annals passage.

Earl Doherty

Hi Earl

I've suggested in previous threads that, at least before the end of persecution, Christians would have been reluctant to draw attention to a passage claiming that anti-Christian measures originated in a belief that Christians are arsonists.

Andrew Criddle



07-21-2008, 02:57 AM

#39

aa5874

Contributor

Join Date: Feb 2006
Location: the fringe of the caribbean
Posts: 18,988



Quote:

Originally Posted by **andrewcriddle** [▶](#)
Hi Earl

I've suggested in previous threads that, at least before the end of persecution, Christians would have been reluctant to draw attention to a passage claiming that anti-Christian measures originated in a belief that Christians are arsonists.

Andrew Criddle

This is an extremely weak suggestion. Chistians were accused of being atheists and cannibals and the early so-called Christian writers made mention of these accusations in their writing.



07-21-2008, 07:19 AM

#40

andrewcriddle

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004
Location: Birmingham UK
Posts: 4,876



Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** [▶](#)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **andrewcriddle** [▶](#)
Hi Earl

I've suggested in previous threads that, at least before the end of persecution, Christians would have been reluctant to draw attention to a passage claiming that anti-Christian measures originated in a belief that Christians are arsonists.

Andrew Criddle

This is an extremely weak suggestion. Chistians were accused of being atheists and cannibals and the early so-called Christian writers made mention of these accusations in their writing.

That's a good point.

However in those cases, Christian writers were trying to refute current widespread beliefs about them.

IF Tacitus' claims about why Nero persecuted Christians were not widely or generally known, then I don't think Christians would have wanted to publicise them.

Andrew Criddle



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Is the Forgery of Tacitus' Annals in the Renaissance an Untenable Position?

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The FRDB Archive

Greetings neilgodfrey,

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07-21-2008, 08:01 AM

#41

[neilgodfrey](#)

Senior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005

Location: Darwin, Australia

Posts: 874



Quote:

Originally Posted by [andrewcriddle](#)

IF Tacitus' claims about why Nero persecuted Christians were not widely or generally known, then I don't think Christians would have wanted to publicise them.

Andrew Criddle

But Tacitus nowhere blames the Christians for starting the fire. He says it was caused either by accident or by Nero himself:

From the old [Thomas Gordon translation](#):

Quote:

There followed a dreadful calamity, but **whether merely fortuitous, or by the execrable contrivance of the Prince, is not determined; for both are by authors asserted . . .**

and accuses Nero of setting up the Christians as scapegoats because of the widespread suspicion that he himself was the one responsible for the fire:

Quote:

But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the Prince could bestow, nor all the atonements which could be presented to the Gods, availed to acquit Nero from the hideous charge, which was still universally believed, that by him the conflagration was authorized. **Hence to suppress the prevailing rumour, he transferred the guilt upon fictitious criminals**, and subjected to most exquisite tortures, and doomed to executions singularly cruel those people who, for their detestable crimes were already in truth universally abhorred, and known to the vulgar by the name of **Christians**.

Tacitus effectively says the Christians (however much he disliked them) were innocent victims of Nero's tyranny. This seems to me a passage screaming out for use by the Church Fathers and Apologists. "Even their own historian, Tacitus, testifies that we Christians are the innocent victims of unjust Emperors!"

Neil



07-21-2008, 09:00 AM

#42


[andrewcridle](#)

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004
Location: Birmingham UK
Posts: 4,876



Quote:

Originally Posted by [neilgodfrey](#) 
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Neil

The Gordon translation is classed by Church and Brodribb as *a complete failure*

The Latin for the passage in which Nero accuses the Christians is

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin...out=&loc=15.44>

Quote:

sed non ope humana, non largitionibus principis aut deum placamentis decedebat infamia quin iussum incendium crederetur. ergo abolendo rumori Nero subdidit reos et quaesitissimis poenis adfecit quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos appellabat.

Church and Brodribb

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin...out=&loc=15.44>

Quote:

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 and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace

Although I agree that Tacitus does not say that the Christians were really guilty, the Gordon translation overemphasises their innocence.

Andrew Criddle



07-21-2008, 09:31 AM

#43

aa5874

Contributor

Join Date: Feb 2006
 Location: the fringe of the
 caribbean
 Posts: 18,988



Quote:

Originally Posted by **andrewcriddle** >

Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** >

*This is an extremely weak suggestion.
 Chistians were accused of being atheists
 and cannibals and the early so-called
 Christian writers made mention of these
 accusations in their writing.*

That's a good point.

*However in those cases, Christian writers were
 trying to refute current widespread beliefs about
 them.*

***IF Tacitus' claims about why Nero persecuted
 Christians were not widely or generally known,
 then I don't think Christians would have wanted to
 publicise them.***

Andrew Criddle

But, your suggestion or clarification is just as weak. You are just imagining things. The Christians that Tacitus mentioned cannot be ascertained to be followers or believers in Jesus. You are just making assumptions after assumptions to suit what appears to be a priori belief.

So why would Christians not refute a claim that they were arsonists? And why would not other Christians know that Nero persecuted Christians as arsonists when the persecution involved the ultimate penalty of death?

Another explanation MAY BE that the passage 15.44 was interpolated or that the "Christians" mentioned were NOT believers of Jesus, i.e, NOT Jesus Christians.



07-21-2008, 10:09 AM

#44

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
 Location: Ontario, Canada
 Posts: 1,435



Hello Simon,

You went off on a tangent in responding to my answer to your question. The comparison I made with Josephus' Testimonium was an opening remark, meant only to note

the simple fact that it wasn't mentioned by early Christian writers any more than Tacitus' Annals passage was. Any differences between the two cases is beside the point. I did not use Josephus in any way to argue my point about Tacitus. It was simply an observation of a commonality of silence.

In the course of doing that, you completely ignored my answer to you. You originally asked me what reason early Christian writers would have had to mention the Tacitus passage, implying that there wasn't any. I gave one to you: that all the Fathers were concerned with, many of them fixated on, the persecution of Christians in the early centuries, and this would have been one fundamental reason why they would have noted and talked about the Tacitus account of the Neronian persecution. You did not address my answer to your question at all.

Your comment that Jesus was not respected enough to warrant mention by pagan writers seems irrelevant to the discussion. I don't see why you brought it up.

Tertullian does not mention the Neronian persecution a la Tacitus. Not only is the term "histories" not that specific (see below), you haven't taken the context into account. As well, his description of what Nero did is too vague, and what he does have in mind by it can be seen in other passages in his writings (see below).

When I posted my OP, I mentioned that I might include other parts of my Tacitus chapter in the course of this thread to answer points that came up. Obviously, this is one of them. One often encounters the claim that Tertullian's "consult your histories" remark is a clear indication that he had read Tacitus' Annals 15:44 and was referring to it. I think that is anything but the case.

Quote:

Tertullian

Tertullian is a case in point. His Apology (written around the year 200) is one great rant against the injustice of Roman hatred and persecution of the Christians. As we shall see later, in Chapter II he dissects Pliny's letter to Trajan on the subject. Yet no such attention is given to the Tacitus passage. Now, there is a remark in Chapter V which might be taken—and has been—as an allusion to it. It is worth looking at the context of the remark (in bold):

Quote:

"Tiberius, accordingly, in whose days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligence from Palestine of events which had clearly shown the truth of Christ's divinity, brought the matter before the senate, with his own decision in favor of Christ. The

senate, because it had not given the approval itself, rejected his proposal. Caesar held to his opinion, threatening wrath against all accusers of the Christians. **Consult your histories; you will there find that Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect, making progress then especially at Rome.** But we glory in having our condemnation hallowed by the hostility of such a wretch. For any one who knows him, can understand that not except as being of singular excellence did anything bring on it Nero's condemnation. Domitian, too, a man of Nero's type in cruelty, tried his hand at persecution; but as he had something of the human in him, he soon put an end to what he had begun, even restoring again those whom he had banished."

The opening remarks about Tiberius, if it is not an oral legend, may relate to a Christian document known by Tertullian, one which would have had no basis in reality and was probably part of a complex of forgeries in the latter 2nd century of alleged letters and reports from Pilate to the emperor on the subject of Jesus' crucifixion. Justin is the first to witness to such things in his Apology 48, although some scholars suggest that his "Acts of Pilate" may be simply a product of his own wishful thinking. But is Tertullian's succeeding reference liable to be anything different? What are the "histories" that he urges his pagan reader to consult? We should note that the word for "histories" here is "*commentarios*" which may be better translated as "records," whereas when he elsewhere refers directly to Tacitus' works he calls them "*historiae*," thus calling into question that he has in mind here the Annals of Tacitus. It could be no more than the same sort of 'record' he has just described about Tiberius, which is to say, a Christian fabrication which he assumes the Romans have a copy of. Such is indicated when later in the Apology (ch.21) he declares that the Romans also have "in your archives" an account of the world darkness at the crucifixion. This is perhaps another reference to a communication from Pilate, a circulating forgery in Christian communities. Or, he could simply be presuming that documentary records of all these things exist even if they do not, somewhat in the manner of Justin. The "records" Tertullian refers to which supposedly contain the history of the Neronian persecution may have had no more substance than the report of the darkness or the efforts of Tiberius to champion Christ's divinity. To recommend these fantasies to the pagan shows the height of naivete to which early Christian apologists attained.

However, we are still left with his silence on the Tacitean passage itself. Only a few chapters earlier, he has taken apart Pliny's letter to Trajan, waxing furiously and bitterly about the injustices and contradictions in the Roman policy toward Christians at that time. Why did he not do the same for Tacitus, with its much more lurid and offensive descriptions of the horrors and injustices inflicted on the Christians, in language that rivaled Tertullian's own? It is almost inconceivable that he would not be led to discuss it directly. As for what he does say, referring to Nero being the first "who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect," this may well be limited to the legendary executions of Peter and Paul. In fact, that is precisely what he conveys in his Scorpiace (ch.15):

Quote:

"We read the lives of the Caesars: At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. Then is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross. Then does Paul obtain a birth suited to Roman citizenship, when in Rome he springs to life again ennobled by martyrdom. Wherever I read of these occurrences, so soon as I do so I learn to suffer; nor does it signify to me which I follow as teachers of martyrdom, whether the declarations or the deaths of the apostles, save that in their deaths I recall their declarations also."

The reference to "lives of the Caesars" would seem to be a reference to Suetonius, and perhaps that work is what he had in mind in the above quote about "consult your histories." But Suetonius, in his brief reference to "punishment" of the Christians, had given no specifics, and Tertullian's only example of those whom Nero "stained with blood" are Peter and Paul, an example formed by Christian legend. He speaks of the "teachers of martyrdom," but these for him are limited to the apostles. Had he been familiar with Tacitus, he would have had many more dramatic examples and teachers to present.

In *De Praescriptione* (On Prescription Against Heretics), ch.36, Tertullian praises the apostolic churches of the empire. When he gets to Rome itself, he eulogizes its heritage in blood:

Quote:

"How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! Where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's! Where

Paul wins his crown in a death like John's!
Where the Apostle John was first plunged,
unhurt, into boiling oil, and then remitted
to his island-exile!"

This passage alone, with its silence on any martyrs beyond the apostles, should demonstrate that Tertullian knows of no general persecution of Christians under Nero.

Tertullian also refers to a persecution under Domitian, showing that he was capable of highlighting general persecutions beyond that of individual apostles, though scholars today doubt a Domitian persecution entirely or else view it as having been low-key and sporadic (see below). In any case, Tertullian is a prime illustration of the Christian obsession with persecution, which raises the question of why no one before the end of the 4th century offered any comment reflecting the dramatic account in Tacitus.

Later in the chapter, I point out that Eusebius is also not only silent on the Tacitus passage as well, he too, like Tertullian, focuses on a persecution by Nero which relates only to the apostles Peter and Paul, again entirely dependent on Christian legend, and not to any general slaughter of Christians in Rome. In neither Eusebius nor Tertullian is there any indication that they have knowledge of Annals 15:44, or indeed of any tradition that Christians had been accused of setting the great fire and suffered persecution on that account.

Earl Doherty



07-21-2008, 10:59 AM

#45

[neilgodfrey](#)

Senior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005
Location: Darwin, Australia
Posts: 874



Quote:

Originally Posted by **andrewcriddle**

Although I agree that Tacitus does not say that the Christians were really guilty, the Gordon translation overemphasises their innocence.

Andrew Criddle

Fair enough. That was the only one I could find online, and I'm happy to ditch it for your translation, or the Michael Grant translation that I am familiar with, but need to type out myself. If this is also wanting, I'm happy to be informed. (I concede his choice of "scapegoats" is very likely contextual.)

Quote:

Disaster followed. Whether it was accidental or caused by the emperor's criminal act is uncertain - both versions have supporters.

Quote:

To suppress this rumour, Nero fabricated scapegoats -- and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called).

And he continues by asserting that popular opinion, however much it detested the Christians as Christians, also acknowledged their innocence:

Quote:

Despite their guilt as Christians, and the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were pitied. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man's brutality rather than to the national interest.

Neil



07-22-2008, 05:56 AM

#46


andrewcridle

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004
Location: Birmingham UK
Posts: 4,876



Quote:


Originally Posted by **neilgodfrey** 
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Quote:

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fabricated scapegoats corresponds to *subdidit reos*. *reos* on a literal translation should be *culprits*. The real problem is *subdidit* which has a range of meanings from *substitute* to *substitute falsely* to *counterfeit*. So IIIUC *fabricated scapegoats* is a perfectly possible rendering but so is the weaker *substituted other culprits*

Quote:

Originally Posted by **neilgodfrey** 
And he continues by asserting that popular opinion, however much it detested the Christians as

Christians, also acknowledged their innocence:

Quote:

Despite their guilt as Christians, and the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were pitied. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man's brutality rather than to the national interest.

Neil

IMHO popular opinion is represented as objecting to the indiscriminate sadism of Nero rather than holding that the Christians were entirely innocent.

Andrew Criddle



07-22-2008, 06:15 AM

#47

andrewcriddle

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004
Location: Birmingham UK
Posts: 4,876



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**

Quote:

Tertullian

.....
.....

Tertullian also refers to a persecution under Domitian, showing that he was capable of highlighting general persecutions beyond that of individual apostles, though scholars today doubt a Domitian persecution entirely or else view it as having been low-key and sporadic (see below). In any case, Tertullian is a prime illustration of the Christian obsession with persecution, which raises the question of why no one before the end of the 4th century offered any comment reflecting the dramatic account in Tacitus.

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Earl Doherty

Hi Earl

Eusebius certainly knew I Clement
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1010.htm> which after describing the martyrdom of Peter and Paul goes on

Quote:

To these men [Peter and Paul] who spent their lives in the practice of holiness, there is to be added a great multitude of the elect, who, having through envy endured many indignities and tortures, furnished us with a most excellent example. Through envy, those women, the Danaids and Dircaë, being persecuted, after they had suffered terrible and unspeakable torments, finished the course of their faith with steadfastness, and though weak in body, received a noble reward.

This presumably refers to other Christians killed together with Peter and Paul.

Hence I think it most unlikely that Eusebius saw the persecution by Nero as confined to Peter and Paul. In fact Eusebius explicitly attests (Book 3 chapter 30) to the martyrdom of Peter's wife presumably just before Peter was killed.

Andrew Criddle



07-22-2008, 05:25 PM

#48

Roger Pearse

Veteran Member


Join Date: Apr 2002

Location: N/A

Posts: 4,370



Quote:

Originally Posted by **andrewcriddle** 
Hi Roger thanks for this.

One point: in the part I think you may have inadvertently got a heading mixed up with the main text (the phrase I've bolded) I would translate

Quote:

Paulinus has copied from Tacitus' 13th and 14th and 15th book of the "Annals", (and at the same time emphasized in the Mediceus II by marginal notes), those passages which

Ah! I knew something was wrong there but my eyeballs were crossing with tiredness and I couldn't work out why I had a problem. Thanks for fixing that, and for posting that stuff in the first place. Always interesting to hear about such things.

All the best,

Roger Pearse



07-23-2008, 04:29 AM

#49

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
 Location: Ontario, Canada
 Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Andrew**
Eusebius certainly knew 1 Clement
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1010.htm>
which after describing the martyrdom of Peter and Paul goes on

Quote:

To these men [Peter and Paul] who spent their lives in the practice of holiness, there is to be added a great multitude of the elect, who, having through envy endured many indignities and tortures, furnished us with a most excellent example. Through envy, those women, the Danaids and Dircaë, being persecuted, after they had suffered terrible and unspeakable torments, finished the course of their faith with steadfastness, and though weak in body, received a noble reward.

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A reference to Peter's wife being killed along with him doesn't really speak to a multitude of Christians being martyred. It is simply an expansion on the legend of Peter and Paul's death at Nero's hands. And it still doesn't explain why Eusebius makes no specific reference to the Neronian persecution as presented by Tacitus, regardless of what we might think to 'infer' from his knowledge of other writings.

(We see a similar expansion in the Acts of Paul in which Paul's martyrdom account includes certain people who admit to being Christians along with him, but there is no general martyrdom of Christians and no mention of the Great Fire accusation. Nero has those Christians burned with fire because Paul has made a rash prediction to Nero about Christ destroying the world by fire.)

As far as 1 Clement is concerned, that 'inference' based on Eusebius' knowledge of this letter depends on how you interpret it. I happen to have a different take on that passage (chapters 5 into 6), and I'll post the section in my Tacitus chapter on it:

Quote:

Epistle of Clement

It is sometimes claimed that the epistle 1 Clement, evidently written in the 90s of the first century, refers obliquely to the Neronian persecution. After the writer has spoken of Peter and Paul in chapter 5, he goes on in chapter 6 to say: "To these men with their holy lives was gathered a great multitude of the chosen, who were the victims of jealousy and offered among us the fairest example in their endurance under many indignities and tortures." He speaks of women "suffering terrible and unholy indignities," who "steadfastly finished the course of faith and received a noble reward" (translated by K. Lake, in the Loeb Classical Library).

This is woolly language which fails to speak explicitly of death and execution. But it follows on similar language which has been applied even to Peter and Paul. While chapter 5 is often appealed to as early evidence of those apostles' martyrdom in Rome, the text does anything but tell us that. Verse 4, for example, is frustratingly vague: "Peter, who because of unrighteous jealousy suffered not one or two but many trials, and having thus given his testimony went to the glorious place which was his due." Neither is Paul explicitly said to have been martyred in Rome, but simply "passed out of this world (after) bearing his testimony before kings and rulers." (And this from a writer who is supposed to be speaking from Rome itself.) In fact, it is not even explicitly stated that they were martyred. Verse 2 says that they "were persecuted and contended until death" (*ediōxthēsan kai heōs thanatou ēthlēsan*). Another translation (by Staniforth, in the Penguin Early Christian Writers) renders the clause, "and had to keep up the struggle till death ended their days." In this document from the turn of the 2nd century, a hundred years before Tertullian, not even a firm tradition about the deaths of Peter and Paul seems to have been established.

It is thus difficult to feel any confidence with those who regard the opening of chapter 6 as a reference to a Neronian persecution. It is not even clear that the "great multitude of the elect" that were "gathered" to Peter and Paul and suffered persecution as well did so at the same time. The author may simply be referring to subsequent persecutions in general since the days of those apostles' experiences. Staniforth, in fact, renders it along such lines: "Besides these men of saintly life, there are many more of the elect who have undergone hardships and torments instigated by jealousy..."



07-23-2008, 05:00 AM

#50


Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
 Location: Midwest
 Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
And it still doesn't explain why Eusebius makes no specific reference to the Neronian persecution as presented by Tacitus.

No novel explanation is necessary; the usual one will do. Eusebius simply offers us very little in the way of references to Latin literature, while his references to Greek literature are profuse. Refer to Andrew Carriker, *The Library of Eusebius of Caesarea*, page 312.

Even Tertullian he knew in a poor Greek translation (which happens to have botched the very line that Eusebius quotes from Tertullian that most clearly refers to a general persecution under Nero).

Ben.

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Greetings neilgodfrey,

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07-23-2008, 07:09 AM

#51

aa5874

Contributor

Join Date: Feb 2006
Location: the fringe of the caribbean
Posts: 18,988



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith** [▶](#)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** [▶](#)
And it still doesn't explain why Eusebius makes no specific reference to the Neronian persecution as presented by Tacitus.

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Even Tertullian he knew in a poor Greek translation (which happens to have botched the very line that Eusebius quotes from Tertullian that most clearly refers to a general persecution under Nero).

Ben.

But presently we are trying to make a determination whether Tacitus Annals is interpolated, yet you are claiming that translations of Greek were poor and a certain line was botched with respect to Tertullian.

How can you single-handedly make such finding when the interpolation issue has not yet been resolved?

It may be that the passage in Annals was botched or from a poor translation.

In fact, your explanation does not resolve anything, it is just an explanation based on your imagination without any evidence or credible support.

What you imagine to be true may actually be completely false.



07-23-2008, 10:40 AM

#52


mountainman

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2006
Location: Falls Creek, Oz.
Posts: 11,192



Quote:

Originally Posted by **andrewcriddle** 
Eusebius certainly knew I Clement
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1010.htm>
which after describing the martyrdom of Peter and Paul goes on

Quote:

To these men [Peter and Paul] who spent their lives in the practice of holiness, there is to be added a great multitude of the elect, who, having through envy endured many indignities and tortures, furnished us with a most excellent example. Through envy, those women, the Danaids and Dircaë, being persecuted, after they had suffered terrible and unspeakable torments, finished the course of their faith with steadfastness, and though weak in body, received a noble reward.

This presumably refers to other Christians killed together with Peter and Paul.

Hence I think it most unlikely that Eusebius saw the persecution by Nero as confined to Peter and Paul. In fact Eusebius explicitly attests (Book 3

chapter 30) to the martyrdom of Peter's wife presumably just before Peter was killed.

Hi Andrew and others,

This is the precise reason why Eusebius is not regarded as any form of integrous historian in the field of ancient history. Biblical (specifically new testament) History cannot relinquish the Eusebian foundation and hence it can be already seen as an island being submerged by the incoming tides of the distribution of the ancient historical evidence as distinct from traditional evidenceless belief. **(in the historicity of stories penned and assembled under the name Eusebius on behalf of)**

Best wishes,

Pete



07-23-2008, 11:12 AM

#53


Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
Location: Midwest
Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** 
But presently we are trying to make a determination whether Tacitus Annals is interpolated, yet you are claiming that translations of Greek were poor and a certain line was botched with respect to Tertullian.

How can you single-handedly make such finding when the interpolation issue has not yet been resolved?

What does a potential interpolation issue in the *Annals* by **Tacitus** have to do with whether the Greek translation of the *Apology* by **Tertullian** that Eusebius used was fair or poor?

And who says I made this finding singlehandedly?

Ben.



07-23-2008, 11:31 AM

#54


aa5874

Contributor

Join Date: Feb 2006
Location: the fringe of the caribbean
Posts: 18,988




Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** 
But presently we are trying to make a determination whether Tacitus Annals is interpolated, yet you are claiming that translations of Greek were poor and a certain line was botched

with respect to Tertullian.

How can you single-handedly make such finding when the interpolation issue has not yet been resolved?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith** 
*What does a potential interpolation issue in the Annals by **Tacitus** have to do with whether the Greek translation of the Apology by **Tertullian** that Eusebius used was fair or poor?*

I thought it was irrelevant to claim the Greek translation was poor, and further it would very difficult for you to show that the translation was indeed poor.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith**
And who says I made this finding singlehandedly?

Ben.

aa5874, and please tell me I am not wrong. I shudder to think other people have made the same finding without any supporting evidence.



 07-23-2008, 11:49 AM

#55


Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
 Location: Midwest
 Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** 
I thought it was irrelevant to claim the Greek translation was poor, and further it would very difficult for you to show that the translation was indeed poor.

That *you* did not see the relevance in no way surprises me.

Quote:

aa5874, and please tell me I am not wrong. I shudder to think other people have made the same finding without any supporting evidence.

Kirsopp Lake in the Loeb edition of the *Church History* of Eusebius notes the poor Greek translation of the original Latin. So does whoever wrote the footnotes for the ANF series at this same point in the text.

Ben.



07-23-2008, 07:06 PM

#56

Roger Pearse

Veteran Member

Join Date: Apr 2002
 Location: N/A
 Posts: 4,370



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith**

Kirsopp Lake in the Loeb edition of the Church History of Eusebius notes the poor Greek translation of the original Latin. So does whoever wrote the footnotes for the ANF series at this same point in the text.

Harnack wrote a book on the Greek translation of the *Apologeticum*, and gives examples.

All the best,

Roger Pearse



07-24-2008, 03:36 AM

#57

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
 Location: Ontario, Canada
 Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**
And it still doesn't explain why Eusebius makes no specific reference to the Neronian persecution as presented by Tacitus.

No novel explanation is necessary; the usual one will do. Eusebius simply offers us very little in the way of references to Latin literature, while his references to Greek literature are profuse.

I'm glad you've joined in here, Ben. But you have entirely missed my point. The key question is not why Eusebius does not make mention of Tacitus, but why he does not make mention of the Neronian persecution in terms which are allegedly recorded by Tacitus. Even if he was completely unfamiliar with Tacitus' Annals, he should certainly have been familiar with a Neronian persecution of the nature that Tacitus describes, if we are to assume that Tacitus' passage is authentic. I have demonstrated that he is not familiar with that kind of Neronian persecution because he restricts such a persecution to the martyrdom of Peter and Paul.

I think it is also debatable that Eusebius could have been ignorant of the Tacitus account, even if it was only by hearsay or a poor translation of the Latin. The existence of such an account could not fail to have become known at least by repute within the Christian community, and (efficient historian that he was--after all, he did track

down a letter written by Jesus) Eusebius would have had every reason to make sure he looked it up.

Anyway, here are a few paragraphs from my treatment of this topic in my new chapter:

Quote:

Eusebius

The church historian Eusebius is also silent on Tacitus. In Book II, chapter 22 of his *History of the Church*, he describes the circumstances of Paul's (presumed) martyrdom in Rome, which would have been around the time of the great fire, and he views Nero as having directed Paul's imprisonment and eventual execution. And yet he too fails to make any mention of the general Neronian persecution of Christians after the fire, even though it would have been natural to link, even identify, the two. There are Christian commentators today (see one just below) who assume that Paul's martyrdom (and Peter's) was part of the massacre of Christians following the fire, so it is very likely that Eusebius should have done the same. Immediately afterward, Eusebius goes on to describe the martyrdom of James the Just in great detail, drawing on legends of the event appearing in Hegesippus. Yet the ghastly description of Nero's persecution we find in the *Annals* has not had any influence on him—nor on any other Christian writer to his time—in forming detailed legends about the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. For all the mania for sensationalist literature about the sufferings and deaths of the saints in those first few centuries, not a single individual or group is associated in such writings with the Neronian persecution as described in Tacitus.

Let's pause for a moment and ask, is it possible that Christians for centuries simply were not familiar with the *Annals*, or with this passage in particular? A moment's thought should render this impossible to accept. It is akin to asking that if a passage such as the extant *Testimonium* were present in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, would Christians not have come to know of it for centuries? (We saw how quickly it spread after Eusebius brought it to life.) If the extant passage in Nero's treatment of the Christians existed at all, even, let's say, without the reference to Christ, any widely-read Christian writer—and there were many—would sooner or later have encountered it, and from that point, because of its nature, it would have spread like wildfire (as such wildfires went in the ancient world) throughout Christian literary circles, and from there to the general population. It is impossible to imagine that Eusebius, by the early 4th century, would not have been familiar with it.

And yet only two chapters later (25) in Book II of History of the Church, he revisits the topic of Nero and the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. Eusebius refers to Nero as "the monster of depravity," to that emperor's "senseless destruction of innumerable lives," which fits the many historical accounts of Nero's own personal rampage of murder against his family members and court officials. Yet there is not a word given to his destruction of innumerable Christian lives as described in Tacitus.

.....

What did Nero do, according to Eusebius? Nero "was led on to murder the apostles. It is recorded that in his reign Paul was beheaded in Rome itself and Peter likewise was crucified." Nothing about the vast numbers of poor Christians tortured and murdered in Nero's pogrom, or the accusation that they had set the great fire. Eusebius' starting point has simply been Christian legend that Peter and Paul were martyred at Rome in the time of Nero. That for him constitutes the 'Neronian persecution.'

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
Even Tertullian he knew in a poor Greek translation (which happens to have botched the very line that Eusebius quotes from Tertullian that most clearly refers to a general persecution under Nero).

Can you quote that line from Tertullian (perhaps also with Eusebius' use of it) which you think "clearly" refers to a general persecution under Nero? Before giving it to us, I would suggest you read my earlier post (#44) about how "clear" Tertullian is *not* about the extent of the Neronian persecution and his alleged dependence on Tacitus' Annals.

Earl Doherty



07-24-2008, 05:11 AM

#58

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005

Location: Midwest

Posts: 4,787



Eusebius, *History of the Church* 2.25.3-5a:

But with all these things this particular in the catalogue of his crimes was still wanting, that he was the first of the emperors who showed himself **an enemy of the divine religion**. The Roman Tertullian is likewise a witness of this. He writes as follows: Examine your records. There you will find that **Nero was the first that persecuted this doctrine,**

particularly then when after subduing all the east, **he exercised his cruelty against all at Rome**. We glory in having such a man the leader in our punishment. For whoever knows him can understand that nothing was condemned by Nero unless it was something of great excellence. Thus **having announced** himself as the first among the principal enemies of God, **he was led on** to the slaughter of the apostles.

Here the execution of the apostles is distinct from the beginning of the persecution of the Christian faith.

Eusebius, *History of the Church* 2.22.8:

It is probable indeed that, as Nero was more disposed to mildness in the beginning, the defense by Paul of his doctrine was more easily received, but that, when he had advanced to the commission of lawless deeds of daring, he made **the apostles as well as the others** the subjects of his attacks.

Who are *the others* here? Are they members of the imperial family or other Roman enemies of Nero? Or are they *the other* Christians attacked by Nero?

Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 15:

We read the lives of the Caesars: At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. Then [*tunc*] is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross. Then [*tunc*] does Paul obtain a birth suited to Roman citizenship, when in Rome he springs to life again ennobled by martyrdom.

If *tunc* is taken here in a consecutive sense (as *next*), then Tertullian is saying that Nero (A) stained the faith with blood, then (B) killed Peter, and then (C) killed Paul.

If *tunc* is taken here in a correlative sense (as *at that time*), we ask ourselves: *Which* time? Clearly the time when Nero stained the faith with blood. At *that* time Peter and Paul were killed. This implies, to my mind, that Tertullian has an event in mind *to which* the executions of Peter and Paul belong; he does not have the executions of Peter and Paul in mind as the complete substance of the event.

Tertullian, *Apology* 5.3:

Consult your records: You will there find that Nero was the first emperor who wielded the sword ferociously on **the blood of Christians**, when our religion was just springing up in Rome. But **we** even glory in being first dedicated to destruction by such a monster. For whoever knows him can understand that it could only have been something of supreme excellence that called

forth the condemnation of Nero.

No limiting of the persecutions to the two apostles here. This is a persecution against *Christians*, against *us*.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**
The existence of such an account could not fail to have become known at least by repute within the Christian community....

This is the sort of consideration that sinks the entire argument. We *do not know* that Eusebius knew the Tacitus account, but we *do know* that Eusebius knew 1 Clement (where, as you stated, the persecution of the multitude of Christians is described in the same terms as the persecution of Peter and Paul, so what would Eusebius have thought?) and the Acts of Paul, which has the following line (among others):

Nero therefore went on in Rome, slaying many Christians without a hearing, by the working of the evil one.

Tacitus is not the only text before Eusebius that mentions a general persecution against the Christians by Nero.

Ben.



07-24-2008, 07:50 AM

#59

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
 Location: Ontario, Canada
 Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
If tunc is taken here in a correlative sense (as at that time), we ask ourselves: Which time? Clearly the time when Nero stained the faith with blood. At that time Peter and Paul were killed. This implies, to my mind, that Tertullian has an event in mind to which the executions of Peter and Paul belong; he does not have the executions of Peter and Paul in mind as the complete substance of the event.

Well, Ben, if you are happy having to go through such contortions to tease out an obscure meaning from a text which ought to have been blatantly direct about such an event as the Neronian persecution as we find described in Tacitus, then feel free. You know the old expression, "if it helps you get through the night."

But it ought to be evident to the dispassionate observer that so much of the rebuttal case against observations like my own seems to be of this very nature, contortions to tease out obscure implications from texts which on the surface contain such a perplexing and revealing void.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
Tacitus is not the only text before Eusebius that mentions a general persecution against the Christians by Nero.

But it's all so vague and unspecific, isn't it? And I have explained the Acts of Paul, but I'll give you my full footnote on the subject:

Quote:

It has been suggested that the Acts of Paul (written before the end of the 2nd century) contains an allusion to the Neronian persecution as a result of the great fire. Section 11 tells the tale of the martyrdom of Paul. After a dramatic miracle in which Paul raises a dead boy, Nero finds that many of those surrounding him are Christians, which leads him to seek out other Christians in the city; he has them all imprisoned along with Paul. Paul boldly tells the emperor that one day Christ will destroy the world with fire. An enraged Nero decrees that all the prisoners will themselves be executed by fire, though Paul will die by beheading. There is no mention of the Great Fire itself, or of Christians punished for setting it. The whole proceedings have grown out of the basic legend of Paul's own martyrdom.

And I think I dealt with the so-called 'clarity' of Tertullian in regard to a Neronian persecution in that post #44.

Nor do I accept the feasibility that Eusebius could have been totally unaware of the Tacitus passage, in one way or another. That a Christian historian obviously fixated on the history of martyrdom could have passed that up is inconceivable, or limited it to brief phrases like " and other Christians". No link with the fire is made, and we have seen other indicators that individuals attached to Peter and Paul were seen as martyred along with them, and that alone could account for all those trivial little phrases you point to in History of the Church.

That's all I can say. And I'll leave it up to others to judge for themselves.

Earl Doherty



07-24-2008, 10:06 AM

#60

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member


Join Date: May 2005

Location: Midwest

Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
Well, Ben, if you are happy having to go through such contortions to tease out an obscure meaning from a text which ought to have been blatantly

direct about such an event as the Neronian persecution as we find described in Tacitus, then feel free.

I am puzzled at your characterization of my argument as *contortions*. I pointed out what *tunc* appears to imply, under either of its two principal meanings; that is all.

Quote:

But it's all so vague and unspecific, isn't it?

Yes, it is. But you read stuff into the vagueness that I do not. I do not even claim that either Tertullian or Eusebius knew Tacitus! (Though it seems more likely that the former would have known him than the latter.)

Quote:

And I have explained the Acts of Paul, but I'll give you my full footnote on the subject:

Quote:

It has been suggested that the Acts of Paul (written before the end of the 2nd century) contains an allusion to the Neronian persecution as a result of the great fire. Section 11 tells the tale of the martyrdom of Paul. After a dramatic miracle in which Paul raises a dead boy, Nero finds that many of those surrounding him are Christians, which leads him to seek out other Christians in the city; he has them all imprisoned along with Paul. Paul boldly tells the emperor that one day Christ will destroy the world with fire. An enraged Nero decrees that all the prisoners will themselves be executed by fire, though Paul will die by beheading. There is no mention of the Great Fire itself, or of Christians punished for setting it. The whole proceedings have grown out of the basic legend of Paul's own martyrdom.

So, when a text does *not* explicitly say that Nero killed ordinary Christians, it is to your favor; and, when a text *does* explicitly say that Nero killed ordinary Christians, it is to your favor. Must be nice. 😊

Quote:

And I think I dealt with the so-called 'clarity' of Tertullian in regard to a Neronian persecution in that post #44.

Your argument depends wholly upon what *you expect*

writers who knew of the persecution would or would not write. I reject your expectations. As usual.

Quote:

Nor do I accept the feasibility that Eusebius could have been totally unaware of the Tacitus passage, in one way or another.

He most certainly could have been. You are simply mistaken here.

Quote:

No link with the fire is made....

On this we agree.

Quote:

That's all I can say. And I'll leave it up to others to judge for themselves.

Ditto.

Ben.



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Is the Forgery of Tacitus' Annals in the Renaissance an Untenable Position?

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07-24-2008, 10:33 AM

#61

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
Location: Ontario, Canada
Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**

Quote:

And I have explained the Acts of Paul, but I'll give you my full footnote on the subject:

It has been suggested that the Acts of Paul (written before the end of the 2nd century) contains an allusion to the Neronian persecution as a result of the great fire. Section 11 tells the tale of the martyrdom of Paul. After a dramatic miracle in which Paul raises a dead boy, Nero finds that many of those surrounding him are Christians, which leads him to seek out

other Christians in the city; he has them all imprisoned along with Paul. Paul boldly tells the emperor that one day Christ will destroy the world with fire. An enraged Nero decrees that all the prisoners will themselves be executed by fire, though Paul will die by beheading. There is no mention of the Great Fire itself, or of Christians punished for setting it. The whole proceedings have grown out of the basic legend of Paul's own martyrdom.

So, when a text does not explicitly say that Nero killed ordinary Christians, it is to your favor; and, when a text does explicitly say that Nero killed ordinary Christians, it is to your favor. Must be nice.

Well, it's nice if it works. And I think in this case it does work, and it illustrates my point. The text does explicitly say that Nero killed ordinary Christians, but it is a development, as I've said, *out of* the legend of the martyrdom of Paul. Actually, by the author of the *Acts of Paul* describing this 'round-up' of other Christians as proceeding out of Nero's contact with Paul, he is showing his ignorance of the round-up of Christians as a result of the Great Fire and Nero's attempt to put the blame on them.

It is things like this (and that includes Tertullian) which illustrate the starting point as legends surrounding Paul's death, leading to the inclusion of other individuals or groups of Christians being brought into the legend as well. It is the latter which can easily explain certain comments by Eusebius which bring in those "others", still leaving him silent and apparently ignorant on the picture created in Tacitus. Thus there is no support or clear evidence for knowledge in the early centuries by Christians about a Neronian persecution which involves a mass slaughter on Nero's part due to him accusing them of burning down the city of Rome. And that in turn places a huge question mark on the reliability of the Tacitus passage, with its reference to "Christus."

You are, of course, free to disagree over the question of whether Eusebius should have known about the fire and the consequent persecution. But you are still confusing the question of whether Eusebius could be expected to know about Tacitus own description of the fire and persecution by reading him, with the question of whether Eusebius could be expected to know about that fire and resulting persecution per se, regardless of his source. The former may be debatable. The latter should not be. If he knew, then we have every reason to expect clear mention of that 'fact', especially when discussing the idea of persecution by Nero. The same applies to Tertullian. We don't get it.

If a number of Japanese historians were to write about the end of the Second World War and talked about the

circumstances which led the Japanese emperor to surrender, and they all mentioned the fears he had that an invasion by the American army would lead to too much destruction of the countryside and losses to the Japanese military, but nothing about the dropping of the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the levelling of those cities, would we be justified in questioning one lone American historian who claimed that such bombs were dropped? I think we would. And I think we would be justified in appealing to a reasonable expectation that such Japanese historians *should* have mentioned them.

Of course, it would be your prerogative to disagree.

Earl Doherty



07-24-2008, 10:50 PM

#62

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
Location: Midwest
Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** [▶](#)
The text does explicitly say that Nero killed ordinary Christians, but it is a development, as I've said, out of the legend of the martyrdom of Paul.

You certainly asserted this (*said it*, to use your word); but I did not find an actual argument to that effect.

Quote:

Actually, by the author of the *Acts of Paul* describing this 'round-up' of other Christians as proceeding out of Nero's contact with Paul, he is showing his ignorance of the round-up of Christians as a result of the Great Fire and Nero's attempt to put the blame on them.

The great fire is, and always has been, a red herring in the debate on authenticity.

The fire did happen, as we know from both Tacitus (the passage under scrutiny) and Suetonius (*Nero 38*). *But only Tacitus connects the fire to the Christians.*

The persecution of Christians under Nero happened (to whatever extent), as we know from Tertullian, the Acts of Paul, Suetonius (*Nero 16.2*), Tacitus (the passage under scrutiny again), and hints or indications in various other sources. *But only Tacitus connects the fire to the Christians.*

Tacitus may be wrong about that connection; he may merely be putting two and two together; or he may have had access to official Roman documents that we no longer have.

Quote:

But you are still confusing the question of whether Eusebius could be expected to know about Tacitus own description of the fire and persecution by reading him, with the question of whether Eusebius could be expected to know about that fire and resulting persecution per se, regardless of his source.

Suetonius knows both about the fire and about the persecution of Christians. Yet he does not connect the two. You seem to be requiring of Eusebius what even a Roman historian is not required to do.

Before century IV, Tacitus is our *only* extant source (AFAIK) for the connection of the fire with the persecution. If someone (say, Eusebius) did not know Tacitus, there is no reason to *assume* that he would have known about that connection.

And, even if an author *did* know about the connection with the fire, one would not be required to mention it. As I said before, I reject your expectations of what an ancient author should or should not have written; they have proven quite fallible before.

Quote:

You are, of course, free to disagree....

Of course, it would be your prerogative to disagree.

That is a freedom, a prerogative, that I exercise to its fullest. 😊

Ben.



07-25-2008, 09:12 AM

#63

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005

Location: Ontario, Canada

Posts: 1,435



Ben, you puzzle me--although I will not be writing a book called "The Ben Puzzle." I know you exist. It's just that I'm not sure about your reasoning.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**
The text does explicitly say that Nero killed ordinary Christians, but it is a development, as I've said, out of the legend of the martyrdom of Paul.

You certainly asserted this (said it, to use your

word); but I did not find an actual argument to that effect.

The argument is inherent in the demonstration. If the killing of ordinary Christians is part of the story recounted in something like the Acts of Paul, with no other connection in evidence, then it is obvious that the most compelling deduction is that it is an adjunct to the legend of Paul's martyrdom. No other identification for it is ever offered by any Christian writer before the end of the 4th century. You are implicitly suggesting that the author of those Acts, and Eusebius himself, have lifted out a motif attached to a tradition surrounding the great fire, then stuck it into the legend of Paul's martyrdom while completely stripping it away from its supposed traditional association. Do you think that suggestion makes more sense than mine?

Quote:

The fire did happen, as we know from both Tacitus (the passage under scrutiny) and Suetonius (Nero 38). But only Tacitus connects the fire to the Christians.

The persecution of Christians under Nero happened (to whatever extent), as we know from Tertullian, the Acts of Paul, Suetonius (Nero 16.2), Tacitus (the passage under scrutiny again), and hints or indications in various other sources. But only Tacitus connects the fire to the Christians.

Of course the fire happened. But if only Tacitus (as it stands) connects any persecution of Christians under Nero with the fire, then this calls that connection into question, since we have every right to expect Christian writers to make that connection, too--as well as other Roman historians, such as Suetonius and Cassius Dio, who do not. And if we can see in those Christian writers a persecution under Nero only in terms of it being part of the martyrdom of Paul and nothing to do with the fire, then we have no justification for using this to claim that our extant Tacitus, with its connection to the fire, is correct. The only 'justification' for doing so is in the Christian interests of preserving the full authenticity of 15:44 with its reference to Christus as an historical figure.

Quote:

Tacitus may be wrong about that connection;

Well, someone was. But this is something new, Ben. I'm glad to see that you realize that a possible reason why no Christian writer speaks of a persecution by Nero as a result of the fire, is because there was no such persecution. But was it Tacitus who got it wrong? One of the most reliable of Roman historians writing only four decades 'after the fact'? Did he put "two and two together" and come up with five? Where might he have gotten such

erroneous information? It certainly wasn't from the Christians, who never breathe a word of it for three centuries.

Quote:

Suetonius knows both about the fire and about the persecution of Christians. Yet he does not connect the two. You seem to be requiring of Eusebius what even a Roman historian is not required to do.

Ben, you have quietly slipped over to the other side of the room. You now seem to be openly arguing that no such event such as Tacitus describes took place. No accusation by Nero that Christians had set fire to the city and his slaughter of them on that account. This is quite the opposite to your previous stance, that all those unspecific references in Tertullian and Eusebius and Acts of Paul to 'other ordinary Christians' martyred along with Paul really echoed the classic Neronian persecution as described by Tacitus. Now you are saying that the silence in the Christian writers is supported by the silence in Suetonius, both of which attest to "Tacitus getting it wrong." That's quite a switch. But at least it's progress.

You're right that Suetonius does not connect the two. He talks about the fire in one place, with no involvement of Christians. And he talks about a "punishment inflicted upon the Christians" in another, with no mention of the fire. (This is distinct, of course, from his more famous "Jews and Chrestus" passage.) You're right in suggesting that the latter may indicate (if it is genuine to Suetonius, though there is some grounds to question this), supported by hints in Tertullian, Eusebius--and Melito--that *some* "persecution of Christians under Nero happened (to whatever extent)," and in fact I deal with this possibility myself in the chapter on Tacitus, though I regard it as buried behind those Christian 'hints' since they have been influenced more immediately by Pauline martyrdom legends. But that '*something*' happening under Nero, even if not the gore-fest envisioned in Tacitus, or even by Tertullian and Eusebius, is very possible and quite acceptable.

What is not acceptable is really the bottom line of this whole discussion: claiming that the passage in Tacitus is still somehow reliable enough (even though he got its basic element wrong) to preserve the reference to Christ as coming from him and as evidence from a Roman historian for an historical figure. Once you admit that fundamental element of the chapter as erroneous, you open up a can of worms, releasing a bunch of little critters that eat away at any basis we might have had to regard Tacitus as a witness to the historical Jesus.

Welcome to my club.

Earl Doherty



07-25-2008, 10:45 AM

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member


Join Date: May 2005

Location: Midwest

Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
Ben, you puzzle me--although I will not be writing a book called "The Ben Puzzle." I know you exist. It's just that I'm not sure about your reasoning.

The reason for this is clarified later in your post; you are assuming things about my position that are not so.

Quote:

If the killing of ordinary Christians is part of the story recounted in something like the Acts of Paul, with no other connection in evidence, then it is obvious that the most compelling deduction is that it is an adjunct to the legend of Paul's martyrdom.

This is not at all obvious to me. I think the tradition is just as capable of transmitting *Nero killed Paul and others* as it is *Nero killed Paul*.

In fact, in Suetonius we find *Nero killed Christians*, with no mention of Paul.

Quote:

No other identification for it is ever offered by any Christian writer before the end of the 4th century. You are implicitly suggesting that the author of those Acts, and Eusebius himself, have lifted out a motif attached to a tradition surrounding the great fire, then stuck it into the legend of Paul's martyrdom while completely stripping it away from its supposed traditional association.

That is not at all what I am suggesting! How can I be suggesting that anybody lifted a motif out of a tradition surrounding the great fire, when I am not even sure that anybody (except Tacitus) knew of a tradition that explicitly included the great fire?

Quote:

Of course the fire happened. But if only Tacitus (as it stands) connects any persecution of Christians under Nero with the fire, then this calls that connection into question....

Yes, it is at least open to debate, as I explicitly stated.

Quote:

And if we can see in those Christian writers a persecution under Nero only in terms of it being part of the martyrdom of Paul and nothing to do

with the fire....

As I demonstrated before, the persecution of Christians is not part of the martyrdom of Paul in Tertullian or in Eusebius; rather, the reverse; the martyrdom of Paul is part of the persecution of Christians both in Tertullian (at that time, the time of the persecution, Nero killed Paul) and in Eusebius (having persecuted Christians as Tertullian says, Nero turned around and killed Paul and Peter).

Quote:

...then we have no justification for using this to claim that our extant Tacitus, with its connection to the fire, is correct.

Again, I already stated that Tacitus may be wrong about the connection to the fire. This is why the fire is a red herring. He could be completely wrong about the reason for the persecution and completely right about the fact of the persecution itself.

Quote:

Well, someone was. But this is something new, Ben. I'm glad to see that you realize that a possible reason why no Christian writer speaks of a persecution by Nero as a result of the fire, is because there was no such persecution.

This is something new, all right. This is you stripping away one of your errant assumptions about my position. Where have I ever said that Tacitus had to be right about the fire?

Quote:

But was it Tacitus who got it wrong? One of the most reliable of Roman historians writing only four decades 'after the fact'? Did he put "two and two together" and come up with five? Where might he have gotten such erroneous information? It certainly wasn't from the Christians, who never breathe a word of it for three centuries.

You got that right. He did not get that information from the Christians. (Makes one wonder what else he might not have gotten from the Christians in that passage.)

Quote:

Ben, you have quietly slipped over to the other side of the room. You now seem to be openly arguing that no such event such as Tacitus describes took place.

No! I am ambivalent as to the connection with the fire. Completely ambivalent. Not that I do not care; rather, I have little way of knowing other than simply taking Tacitus

at his word.

Quote:

This is quite the opposite to your previous stance, that all those unspecific references in Tertullian and Eusebius and Acts of Paul to 'other ordinary Christians' martyred along with Paul really echoed the classic Neronian persecution as described by Tacitus.

That is still my stance. I am not following you. Hopefully this will clear it up for you:

1. Tacitus wrote that Nero persecuted Christians.
2. Suetonius wrote that Nero persecuted Christians.
3. Tertullian wrote that Nero persecuted Christians, and also that Nero killed Paul.
4. Eusebius quoted Tertullian to the effect that Nero persecuted Christians, and then adds that he also killed Paul.
5. The author of the Acts of Paul wrote that Nero persecuted Christians, and also that Nero killed Paul.

Do you see the common thread here? All agree, whether Christian or pagan, that Nero persecuted Christians. The Christian authors also affirm that Nero killed Paul.

That is my position, that Nero persecuted Christians and killed Paul. That has *always* been my position. I have also been arguing against *your position*:

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty, emphasis added**
Eusebius focuses on a persecution by Nero which relates only to the apostles Peter and Paul....

That is what I am arguing against.

Quote:

Now you are saying that the silence in the Christian writers is supported by the silence in Suetonius, both of which attest to "Tacitus getting it wrong."

Again, *no*. (I find it hard to believe that my prose is really this difficult to understand, but perhaps it is.)

I am saying, and have been saying, that Suetonius, Tacitus, and the Christian writers *agree* that Nero persecuted Christians.

I pointed up Suetonius not linking this persecution to the fire because of your apparent expectation that Eusebius should have (A) known about the fire and (B) therefore connected it to the Christian persecution. I am saying nonsense. Eusebius (A) may well not have known about

the fire (Tacitus being the only one who mentions it and Eusebius being rather thin on Latin sources) and (B) may well not have written about it had he known about it (witness Suetonius).

Quote:

You're right that Suetonius does not connect the two. He talks about the fire in one place, with no involvement of Christians. And he talks about a "punishment inflicted upon the Christians" in another, with no mention of the fire. (This is distinct, of course, from his more famous "Jews and Chrestus" passage.) You're right in suggesting that the latter may indicate (if it is genuine to Suetonius, though there is some grounds to question this), supported by hints in Tertullian, Eusebius--and Melito--that *some* "persecution of Christians under Nero happened (to whatever extent)," and in fact I deal with this possibility myself in the chapter on Tacitus, though I regard it as buried behind those Christian 'hints' since they have been influenced more immediately by Pauline martyrdom legends. But that '*something*' happening under Nero, even if not the gore-fest envisioned in Tacitus, or even by Tertullian and Eusebius, is very possible and quite acceptable.

This has been my point *all along*. Christians *other* than Peter and Paul were persecuted under Nero.

Quote:

What is not acceptable is really the bottom line of this whole discussion: claiming that the passage in Tacitus is still somehow reliable enough (even though he got its basic element wrong) to preserve the reference to Christ as coming from him and as evidence from a Roman historian for an historical figure. Once you admit that fundamental element of the chapter as erroneous, you open up a can of worms, releasing a bunch of little critters that eat away at any basis we might have had to regard Tacitus as a witness to the historical Jesus.

This is fundamentally in error. Just because Tacitus may be wrong about something only he reports, he must also be wrong about something that many others support him in?

We have seen that Tacitus *may* be wrong about the motive for the persecution. But we have also seen that Tacitus was *right* about the fact of the fire itself (being supported by Suetonius) and that Tacitus was *right* about the persecution of Christians, at least in general (being supported by Suetonius and by various Christian authors).

I submit that Tacitus was probably also *right* about Christ having been crucified under Pilate (being supported by 1 Timothy, many gospels both canonical and noncanonical,

Ignatius, Justin Martyr, and less direct references in many, many other texts).

Ben.



07-25-2008, 04:29 PM

#65


spamandham

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2004
Location: Dallas, TX
Posts: 11,525



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith** 
Again, I already stated that Tacitus may be wrong about the connection to the fire. This is why the fire is a red herring. He could be completely wrong about the reason for the persecution and completely right about the fact of the persecution itself.

Of course he *could* be wrong about the reason for the persecution, and yet right about the the fact of it, but a more reasonable stance to take, is that if he is wrong about the reason for it *he could just as easily be wrong about the fact of it*, since he is either shooting from the hip, making things up, simply repeating something he heard, or otherwise basing the blurb on something equally unreliable.

So now we have to look for external corroboration.



07-26-2008, 01:32 AM

#66

Simonmagus

Junior Member


Join Date: Jul 2008
Location: Calgary Alberta
Canada
Posts: 5



Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham** 

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith** 
Again, I already stated that Tacitus may be wrong about the connection to the fire. This is why the fire is a red herring. He could be completely wrong about the reason for the persecution and completely right about the fact of the persecution itself.

Of course he could be wrong about the reason for the persecution, and yet right about the the fact of it, but a more reasonable stance to take, is that if he is wrong about the reason for it he could just as easily be wrong about the fact of it, since he is either shooting from the hip, making things up, simply repeating something he heard, or otherwise basing the blurb on something equally unreliable.

So now we have to look for external corroboration.

There *could be* many things, but just because things are possible does in no way indicate they are *plausible*. Occam's Razor slices much of your position away.



07-26-2008, 05:35 AM

#67

spamandham

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2004
Location: Dallas, TX
Posts: 11,525



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Simonmagus**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham**

Of course he could be wrong about the reason for the persecution, and yet right about the the fact of it, but a more reasonable stance to take, is that if he is wrong about the reason for it he could just as easily be wrong about the fact of it, since he is either shooting from the hip, making things up, simply repeating something he heard, or otherwise basing the blurb on something equally unreliable.

So now we have to look for external corroboration.

There could be many things, but just because things are possible does in no way indicate they are plausible. Occam's Razor slices much of your position away.

Are you suggesting that it's implausible that Tacitus knew of persecutions but got the facts wrong as to why they were happening, or are you saying it's implausible that Tacitus was wrong about the persecutions altogether?

Welcome to IIDB, by the way.



07-26-2008, 08:51 AM

#68

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
Location: Midwest
Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith**

Again, I already stated that Tacitus may be wrong about the connection to the fire. This is why the fire is a red herring. He could be completely wrong about the reason for the persecution and completely right about the fact of the persecution itself.

Of course he could be wrong about the reason for the persecution, and yet right about the the fact of it, but a more reasonable stance to take, is that if he is wrong about the reason for it he could just as easily be wrong about the fact of it, since he is either shooting from the hip, making things up, simply repeating something he heard, or otherwise basing the blurb on something equally unreliable.

So now we have to look for external corroboration.

Did you read the rest of my post? I wrote:

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**

- 1.** Tacitus wrote that Nero persecuted Christians.
- 2.** Suetonius wrote that Nero persecuted Christians.
- 3.** Tertullian wrote that Nero persecuted Christians, and also that Nero killed Paul.
- 4.** Eusebius quoted Tertullian to the effect that Nero persecuted Christians, and then adds that he also killed Paul.
- 5.** The author of the Acts of Paul wrote that Nero persecuted Christians, and also that Nero killed Paul.

Ben.



07-26-2008, 09:55 AM

#69

spamandham

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2004
Location: Dallas, TX
Posts: 11,525



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**

- 1.** Tacitus wrote that Nero persecuted Christians.
- 2.** Suetonius wrote that Nero persecuted Christians.
- 3.** Tertullian wrote that Nero persecuted Christians, and also that Nero killed Paul.
- 4.** Eusebius quoted Tertullian to the effect that Nero persecuted Christians, and then adds that he also killed Paul.
- 5.** The author of the Acts of Paul wrote that Nero persecuted Christians, and also that Nero killed Paul.

Ben.

Everyone on this list post dates Tacitus, and even the writings of the earliest from this list, Seutonium', post date

Nero by at least 50 years. I don't see how these are relevant to corroborating Tacitus.



07-26-2008, 12:43 PM

#70

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005

Location: Ontario, Canada

Posts: 1,435



Ben, you have still not demonstrated that either Tertullian or Eusebius refers to a distinctly separate and large-scale Neronian persecution of Christians in general, rather than to legends about Peter and Paul's martyrdom under Nero which may have envisioned a few others being martyred along with them. "Hints" will not do, because if those hints were about a persecution on the scale of that described by Tacitus (and that is my point) they would have been more than hints. Let's look at each of the passages.

Tertullian, Apology 5:

"...Consult your histories; you will there find that Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect, making progress then especially at Rome."

No mention of the fire, nothing resembling the gory scenes described by Tacitus which, even if Tertullian had not read Tacitus, should have been familiar to him in some form simply through Christian tradition. What then is "assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect"? Basically, it could be the martyrdom of Peter and Paul and whatever followers attached to them which legendary tradition and Tertullian's own imagination may have conjured up. This is supported by the next two passages from Tertullian I quoted...

Tertullian, Scorpiace 15:

"At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. Then is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross. Then does Paul...ennobled by martyrdom...nor does it signify to me which I follow as teachers of martyrdom, whether the declarations or the deaths of the apostles..."

Nothing there refers to any other martyrs besides Peter and Paul. (And you already acknowledged the business of "tunc".) In fact, the last quoted line limits the martyrdom specifically to "the apostles." Trying to tease out something further from this passage is wholly unjustified.

Tertullian, De Praescriptione 36:

As I said, in eulogizing the heritage of Rome's martyred blood, he says: "How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! Where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's! Where Paul wins his crown in a death like John's!" Where are the additional remarks about other ordinary Christians being martyred as well, especially on a scale like that in Tacitus?

Eusebius, HE 2,25:

After detailing Nero's personal crimes against his family,

etc., he speaks of one more "crime" to be added. What is it? "He was the first of the emperors to be the declared enemy of the worship of Almighty God." His source? Tertullian's Apology passage above. Which he seems, by the way, to have made a free paraphrase of, because his 'quote' of it shows notable differences:

"Study your records: there you will find that Nero was the first to persecute this teaching when, after subjugating the entire East, in Rome especially he treated everyone with savagery."

If we can't find any clear indication of a major Neronian persecution in Tertullian's comment, we are hardly entitled to find it in Eusebius' alleged quote of that comment.

When he goes on to speak for himself, what does he say? "So it came about that this man, the first to be heralded as a conspicuous fighter against God, was led on to murder the apostles." And he goes on to describe their martyrdoms, also quoting from two earlier Christian writers who speak solely of those martyrdoms. That could be Nero being a conspicuous fighter. That could be his being "declared enemy of the worship of Almighty God." We can't read any more into such comments than that, because that is all the Eusebius gives us. Anything more is wishful thinking. And there is no "Nero persecuted Christians, and then also killed Paul and Peter." That is you forcing a meaning into things which it does not obviously have, since the former can be seen as described by the latter.

The same goes for the Acts of Paul. You say: "The author of the Acts of Paul wrote that Nero persecuted Christians, and also that Nero killed Paul." That is totally misleading. The whole episode begins with Nero questioning Paul, becoming alarmed at Paul's bravado that Christ will destroy all the kingdoms, including Nero's Rome, and then because of this threat Nero rounds up all the Christians he can find and after further provocation from Paul declares that everyone must be executed. The rounding up of the other Christians grows out of the legend of Paul's martyrdom, as I said.

However, all that being said, I have taken some cognizance of those supposed 'hints' in the above passages which you seem to want to blow up into a full-scale persecution. This is not meeting you half-way, however. My purpose all along has been to discredit the passage in Tacitus. I'm quite willing to accept that some Christian writers *may* suggest the possibility of some situation under Nero, although I can't say whether they are just deriving it solely from legends of apostolic martyrdom, or from something else. Anyway, here is that passage in my draft chapter:

Quote:

A Minor Event under Nero?

If we were to decide to reject interpolation in

Suetonius, what are we to make of his brief sentence on the punishment of Christians? As it stands, Suetonius too seems not to know much more, if anything, about the great event recounted in Tacitus than do Christian commentators of the next couple of centuries (allowing that we do not read more into Tertullian than he actually tells us). But if that sentence is his voice, then something would seem to have happened under Nero involving Christians—although they may not have been so referred to in Nero's day. No 1st century pagan writer refers to "Christians" at all, and the only New Testament document datable in the 1st century containing the term is 1 Peter, in 4:16, written possibly in the 80s. Suetonius, writing around 120, may be retrojecting a term of his own time back some half a century. Or the event he is referring to may have had something to do with Jews, which in the evolution of the matter over time came to be associated with or reinterpreted as Christians. Such a tradition might eventually have taken on a dimension and scale which it never originally had. That smaller initial scale, having nothing to do with the fire and hardly encompassing the horrific dimensions of the Tacitus passage, could have found a reflection in Suetonius' spare comment, and even later in Tertullian's limited implication behind his reference in the Apology to Nero's "imperial sword" wielded against the Christians. Finally, by the time of Eusebius whatever happened under Nero has become linked with the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. But still no vast slaughter of Christians and their victimization as perpetrators of Rome's greatest conflagration. The persecution in Tacitus, then, would seem to belong to the fancies of an era that lies somewhat beyond Eusebius.

But perhaps we can get closer to solving the mystery through a passage from Melito of Sardis, as quoted (apparently through Clement of Alexandria) by Eusebius in History of the Church, IV, 26. This is from Melito's Petition to Antoninus (not Pius, but the next emperor Marcus Aurelius) written probably in the 170s. In the midst of the passage, Melito has remarked:

Quote:

"Of all the emperors, the only ones ever persuaded by malicious advisers to misrepresent our doctrine were Nero and Domitian, who were the source of the unreasonable custom of laying false information against the Christians. But their ignorance was corrected by your religious predecessors [former emperors], who constantly rebuked in writing all who ventured to make trouble for our people."

Here we have another expression of that limited understanding of an event or condition under Nero. For Melito, we cannot even be sure that in his mind such an event involved death for those persecuted. Later emperors merely rebuked any who "made trouble for our people." Neither the language nor the tone throughout this passage would even remotely do justice to the monstrous horror of the presentation in Tacitus, and it is again difficult to understand how Melito could touch on the subject of a Neronian persecution and give not a hint of the atrocities it supposedly involved.

It is a few decades later, as we have seen, that we encounter the next stage in Tertullian, in Apology 5, where his view of the matter is that "in your records" Nero was the first "to assail the Christian sect with the imperial sword." This does suggest suffering and death, and certainly Tertullian must have had that in mind to judge by the overall content of the Apology. But the reference is not spelled out, and he or his time may simply be reading that into the Neronian situation based on their current experiences with persecution. Notably, as we can see once again, he provides no link to Tacitus and no context of the fire, a context we must wait another two centuries for.

But now consider another translation of the Melito passage in Eusebius. (This is from A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1: Eusebius.) There the passage from Melito is translated thus, accompanied by a proviso note by the translator that "The sentence is a difficult one and has been interpreted in various ways."

Quote:

"Nero and Domitian, alone, persuaded by certain calumniators, have wished to slander our doctrine, and from them it has come to pass that the falsehood²²⁷ has been handed down, in consequence of an unreasonable practice which prevails of bringing slanderous accusations against the Christians."

Even more so than the Williamson translation, the language here is so mild as to be innocuous. There is no hint of suffering and death under Nero, but only "slander of our doctrine," the genesis of a subsequent practice of "falsehood" against the Christians. (Much of this could merely be referring to the sort of "slander" about Christian practices we find in the mouth of the pagan Caecilius in Minucius Felix, written a little earlier than Melito.) There is no reason to postulate that Melito deliberately held off giving even an implication of

the atrocities suffered under Nero, and we must again conclude that here is a Christian writer in the latter 2nd century who was familiar with no such extreme persecution, and certainly no such passage in Tacitus as now stands there.

Earl Doherty



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Is the Forgery of Tacitus' Annals in the Renaissance an Untenable Position?

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07-26-2008, 03:42 PM

#71

neilgodfrey

Senior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005

Location: Darwin, Australia

Posts: 874



Quote:

Originally Posted by **andrewcridle** [▶](#)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **neilgodfrey** [▶](#)
And he continues by asserting that popular opinion, however much it detested the Christians as Christians, also acknowledged their innocence:

Quote:

Despite their guilt as Christians, and the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were pitied. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man's brutality rather than to the

national interest.

IMHO popular opinion is represented as objecting to the indiscriminate sadism of Nero rather than holding that the Christians were entirely innocent.

It is certainly representing popular opinion as objecting to the sadism of Nero, but does not the next clause, "rather than to the national interest", imply that it was acknowledged that they were not being punished as culpable threats to Rome -- that is, that it is publicly acknowledged that the Christians were not guilty of what Nero himself was suspected, responsibility for the burning of Rome?

In other words, the author of the passage is concurring with the existence of slanders against Christians, while simultaneously presenting the Neronian persecution as occasioned not by these slanders, but by imperial injustice?

Neil



07-26-2008, 08:30 PM

#72


andrewcriddle

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004
Location: Birmingham UK
Posts: 4,876



Quote:

Originally Posted by **neilgodfrey** 
In other words, the author of the passage is concurring with the existence of slanders against Christians, while simultaneously presenting the Neronian persecution as occasioned not by these slanders, but by imperial injustice?

Neil

I would prefer to say that on the one hand the author presents the Christians as bad people deserving severe punishment, but on the other hand suggests that what actually happened to the Christians was more a result of Nero's sadism than a legal punishment for their crimes.

(I think you may be minimizing the problems involved in going behind the rhetoric of this passage to the explicit historical claims being made. The passage represents the persecution as a story of wicked things being done to wicked people by a wicked person. Retelling the story in less rhetorical language, and working out the exact culpability and responsibility being attributed to the different actors, has been made difficult by the way the story is told, maybe intentionally so.)

Andrew Criddle



07-27-2008, 07:34 AM

#73

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
 Location: Midwest
 Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham**

Everyone on this list post dates Tacitus, and even the writings of the earliest from this list, Seutonius', post date Nero by at least 50 years. I don't see how these are relevant to corroborating Tacitus.

Are you kidding me? 50 years is still living memory. Are you saying that Suetonius does *not* corroborate Tacitus?

Ben.



07-27-2008, 08:01 AM

#74

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
 Location: Midwest
 Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**

Ben, you have still not demonstrated that either Tertullian or Eusebius refers to a distinctly separate and large-scale Neronian persecution of Christians in general, rather than to legends about Peter and Paul's martyrdom under Nero which may have envisioned a few others being martyred along with them.

This is partially correct. I did not (even try to) demonstrate the *scale* of the persecutions, beyond noting that they included more than two apostles.

It is also partially incorrect. I did demonstrate the separateness of the persecution from the deaths of the apostles. You simply ignored the sections of my post(s) where I did so.

Quote:

"Hints" will not do, because if those hints were about a persecution on the scale of that described by Tacitus (and that is my point) they would have been more than hints.

More of your expectations. You once *expected* Tertullian to have referred to Galatians 4.4 against Marcion had he known of the *made of a woman* phrase therein, and concluded that he did not even know it based on his silence; yet it was shown to you that Tertullian *did* refer to Galatians 4.4 in another work. Your expectations misled you.

I am going to say this again, but only once; nobody is bound by your expectations. Your expectations are not an argument.

Quote:

Let's look at each of the passages.

Tertullian, Apology 5:

"...Consult your histories; you will there find that Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect, making progress then especially at Rome."

No mention of the fire....

Earl, you berate others for not reading what you write and for returning to discarded points again and again. I suggest you take a dose of your own medicine here.

Quote:

...nothing resembling the gory scenes described by Tacitus which, even if Tertullian had not read Tacitus, should have been familiar to him in some form simply through Christian tradition.

Should have been? More of your expectations. Nothing requiring a rebuttal here.

Quote:

What then is "assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect"? Basically, it could be the martyrdom of Peter and Paul and whatever followers attached to them which legendary tradition and Tertullian's own imagination may have conjured up.

Could be? Sure, could be. Except that Tertullian is backed up by, for example, Suetonius!

The point is that you said these Christian authors had *only* Peter and Paul in mind; and you used that word *only*. That has been shown to be incorrect. Yet for some reason you are still kicking it around.

Quote:

Tertullian, Scorpiace 15:

"At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. Then is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross. Then does Paul...ennobled by martyrdom...nor does it signify to me which I follow as teachers of martyrdom, whether the declarations or the deaths of the apostles..."

Nothing there refers to any other martyrs besides Peter and Paul. (And you already acknowledged

the business of "tunc".)

I already argued, using *tunc*, that these specific executions (of Peter and Paul) are parts of a whole! Are you not reading my posts?

Quote:

Tertullian, De Praescriptione 36:
As I said, in eulogizing the heritage of Rome's martyred blood, he says: "How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! Where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's! Where Paul wins his crown in a death like John's!" Where are the additional remarks about other ordinary Christians being martyred as well, especially on a scale like that in Tacitus?

The whole point of the context here is that the churches in various locales have the authority to convey the apostolic tradition. The deaths of the apostles in these cities are relevant to this context. How is the death of Joe or Jane Christian relevant to this context?

Quote:

Eusebius, HE 2,25:
After detailing Nero's personal crimes against his family, etc., he speaks of one more "crime" to be added. What is it? "He was the first of the emperors to be the declared enemy of the worship of Almighty God." His source? Tertullian's Apology passage above. Which he seems, by the way, to have made a free paraphrase of, because his 'quote' of it shows notable differences:

Okay, now I *know* you are not reading my posts. Can you recall for me the most likely reason *why* this quotation shows these notable difference? Paraphrase is not the answer. If you are reading my posts, you ought to be able to tell me what the standard scholarly reason for the differences is.

Quote:

"Study your records: there you will find that Nero was the first to persecute this teaching when, after subjugating the entire East, in Rome especially he treated everyone with savagery."

If we can't find any clear indication of a major Neronian persecution in Tertullian's comment, we are hardly entitled to find it in Eusebius' alleged quote of that comment.

When he goes on to speak for himself, what does he say? "So it came about that this man, the first to be heralded as a conspicuous fighter against God, was led on to murder the apostles." And he

goes on to describe their martyrdoms, also quoting from two earlier Christian writers who speak solely of those martyrdoms. That could be Nero being a conspicuous fighter. That could be his being "declared enemy of the worship of Almighty God."

No, it cannot be; the grammar is clear. And had you read my post you would know why. Or you would at least have enough information to ask for clarification.

Quote:

We can't read any more into such comments than that, because that is all the Eusebius gives us. Anything more is wishful thinking. And there is no "Nero persecuted Christians, and then also killed Paul and Peter." That is you forcing a meaning into things which it does not obviously have, since the former can be seen as described by the latter.

Not grammatically possible. Refer to my post again.

At this stage of the game you seem merely to be saying that the persecution under Nero was perhaps not as severe as has been imagined. Whatever. That does not interest me, especially since we are given no hard numbers to work with. What was of interest to me was (A) the reason why Eusebius did not refer to Tacitus and (B) the fact that most of these authors envision a persecution not limited to the apostles.

Ben.

ETA: I cut this part out by mistake.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**
The same goes for the Acts of Paul. You say: "The author of the Acts of Paul wrote that Nero persecuted Christians, and also that Nero killed Paul." That is totally misleading.

Let me rephrase then: The author of the Acts of Paul wrote that Nero, because of a run-in with Paul, persecuted Christians, and then also killed Paul.



07-27-2008, 03:59 PM

#75

spamandham

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2004
Location: Dallas, TX
Posts: 11,525



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham**
Everyone on this list post dates Tacitus,

and even the writings of the earliest from this list, Suetonius', post date Nero by at least 50 years. I don't see how these are relevant to corroborating Tacitus.

Are you kidding me? 50 years is still living memory. Are you saying that Suetonius does not corroborate Tacitus?

Ben.

Yes, that's what I'm saying. 50 years is 10 lifetimes of urban legends.



07-27-2008, 07:41 PM

#76

ynquirer

Senior Member

Join Date: Sep 2005
Location: Madrid, Spain
Posts: 572



Both works, *The Annals* and *The Twelve Caesars*, were written in a four-year span. That renders them contemporary to each other, even according to spamandham's narrow criterion of contemporariness – 50 divided into 10 equals 5 years, doesn't it?

Now, there are two different questions. The answers are: yes, Suetonius corroborates Tacitus in the persecution of Christians by Nero, but they disagree in the question about the origin of the word 'Christians'. Tacitus follows Josephus, while Suetonius deems the Jew to be an unreliable source and supports the theory – 'urban legend'? – of a Greek rather than Jewish origin of the Christian faith.



07-28-2008, 04:09 AM

#77


spamandham

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2004
Location: Dallas, TX
Posts: 11,525



Quote:

Originally Posted by **ynquirer** 
– 'urban legend'? – of a Greek rather than Jewish origin of the Christian faith.

I certainly never said anything like that. The discussion was Neronian persecution of Christians as a result of the fire of Rome. The point being, that if Tacitus was wrong about the reason for Christian persecution, then it calls into question his claim of the fact of such persecution.

I do not consider people writing *later* than Tacitus to count as corroboration of what he said. I doubt Tacitus was just making things up, so the fact he wrote about it means he had heard the story somewhere, and implies that others would also have heard it. Suetonius attributes the persecution to a different cause. Are we to conclude therefor that Christians were persecuted under Nero, and yet no-one knew why, or is it simpler to propose that story

evolved by the time Suetonius wrote?

If the first records of some significant event from the US Civil war first surfaced in 1925 by someone who was a toddler at the time of the said event, and his story was internally inconsistent, how seriously would we take it? If another 50 years later, someone else wrote about that same event, but now the facts were different, what would be the most reasonable assumption?

- hence the comment about urban legends.



07-28-2008, 05:18 AM

#78

ynquirer

Senior Member

Join Date: Sep 2005
Location: Madrid, Spain
Posts: 572



Corroboration of Tacitus by Suetonius – a later writer – is not factual evidence that Tacitus got it right: both might be wrong, of course. Furthermore, Suetonius could possibly have been induced to mistake by Tacitus himself. Is that what you mean? I'm afraid it is pointless to the issue of whether or not Annals 15:44 is authentic.

Tacitus on the persecution of Christians by Nero allegedly is an interpolation on the grounds that there is no factual evidence that the persecution ever was. As such a suspect invention it qualifies as the insertion of an unscrupulous Christian writer rather than a serious historian like Tacitus.

The point is that Suetonius corroborates the persecution – whether actual or an urban legend – to be *not* a later invention, and that there was reason for the narrative to be there, exactly where it is.



07-28-2008, 12:59 PM

#79

mountainman

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2006
Location: Falls Creek, Oz.
Posts: 11,192



Quote:

Originally Posted by **ynquirer**

Corroboration of Tacitus by Suetonius – a later writer – is not factual evidence that Tacitus got it right: both might be wrong, of course. Furthermore, Suetonius could possibly have been induced to mistake by Tacitus himself. Is that what you mean? I'm afraid it is pointless to the issue of whether or not Annals 15:44 is authentic.

Tacitus on the persecution of Christians by Nero allegedly is an interpolation on the grounds that there is no factual evidence that the persecution ever was. As such a suspect invention it qualifies as the insertion of an unscrupulous Christian writer rather than a serious historian like Tacitus.

The point is that Suetonius corroborates the persecution – whether actual or an urban legend – to be not a later invention, and that there was

reason for the narrative to be there, exactly where it is.

Persecution was commonplace in the empire at that time. Good people were being persecuted. **THE CHRESTIAN** meaning literally "The Good" were being persecuted. As Arthur Drew's pointed out almost a century ago, this is no witness to the historicity of Jesus.

What needs to be restated today is that none of this provides any evidence for the historicity of **THE CHRISTIAN** in this epoch of antiquity, other than what dear Eusebius informs and misinforms us of, a few centuries later. There is the boundary event (or at least the transition, was it gradual) between the use of the scroll (in the time of Tacitus and Suetonius) and the use of the codex (in the time of the boss).

Best wishes,

Pete



07-28-2008, 02:12 PM

#80

ynquirer

Senior Member

Join Date: Sep 2005
Location: Madrid, Spain
Posts: 572



Suetonius, who mentions 'the Chrestians', does not provide us with evidence of the existence of Jesus, certainly. Yet he corroborates Tacitus, who furnishes the evidence.

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07-28-2008, 03:39 PM

#81

[mountainman](#)

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2006

Location: Falls Creek, Oz.

Posts: 11,192



Yes, but in this instance the question is how late is the Tacitus reference. Who is the first to actually mention the Tacitus reference in an historical sense. A forged reference does not suffice. To quote the OP ...

Quote:

Drews, who wagers on Poggian authorship, is forced to reveal a hand which contains one very low card. In a footnote (p.47) he slips in an observation which shows how problematic the forgery position can be. If the Annals did not exist until the Renaissance, then the passage in Sulpicius is original to him; but it would have to have served as an essential source of certain 15:44 details, due to some close literary commonalities. According to Drews, Hochart pointed out that, while certain other works of

Sulpicius were found in many medieval libraries, "there was only one manuscript of his Chronicle, probably of the eleventh century....Hence the work was almost unknown throughout the Middle Ages, and no one was aware of the reference in it to a Roman persecution of the Christians." But then comes an attempt to come up with an explanation for an attendant sticky problem: "It is noteworthy that Poggio Bracciolini seems by some lucky chance to have discovered and read this manuscript." Of course, there is no actual record that Poggio did have such a fortunate encounter.



07-28-2008, 06:59 PM

#82

ynquirer

Senior Member

Join Date: Sep 2005
Location: Madrid, Spain
Posts: 572



Do you mean that Sulpicious forged Annals 15:44?

07-29-2008, 01:26 AM

#83


mountainman

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2006
Location: Falls Creek, Oz.
Posts: 11,192



Quote:

Originally Posted by **ynquirer** 
Do you mean that Sulpicious forged Annals 15:44?

I think the implication is that Poggio was very lucky to be the one to find the original text of Sulpicious when he did. Have you read [the original arguments of Drews](#)? Here is some of it:

Quote:

As a matter of fact, none of the works of Tacitus have come down to us without inter-
polations. This supposed "purity of the text of Tacitus as shown by the oldest manuscripts" exists only in the imagination of Gibbon and those who follow him. It is, further, not true that the Christians did not read Tacitus. We have a number of instances in the first centuries of Christian writers who are acquainted with Tacitus, such as Tertullian, Jerome, Orosius, Sidonius Apollinaris, Sulpicius Severus, and Cassiodorus. It is only in the

course of the Middle Ages that this acquaintance with the ROMAN historian is gradually lost ; and this not on account of, but in spite of, the passage in Tacitus on the Christians. This testimony of the ROMAN historian to the supposed first persecution of the Christians would be very valuable to them for many reasons.

Are there, however, no witnesses to the genuineness of the passages of Tacitus in early Christian literature? There is the letter of Clement of Rome belonging to the end of the first century. According to Eusebius, 1 it was sent by Clement, the secretary of the Apostle Peter, and the third or fourth bishop of Rome, to the community at Corinth, in the name of the Roman community ; as is also stated by Hegesippus (c. 150) and Dionysius of Corinth. 2 The point is so uncertain, nevertheless, that such distinguished authorities as Semler, Baur, Schweigler, Zeller, Volkmar, 3 Hausrath, 4 Lornan, 5 Van Manen, Von der Burgh, Van Eysing, 6 and Steck, 7 have disputed the genuineness of the letter; and it was reserved for the modern believers in Jesus to discover grounds for regarding it as genuine. Volkmar puts the letter in the year 125 ; Loman, Van Manen, and Steck do not admit its composition earlier than the year 140. The letter cannot, therefore, be regarded as a reliable document on that account.

But what do we learn about the Neronian persecution from the letter of Clement ? " Out of jealousy and envy," he writes to the Corinthians, " the greatest and straightest pillars were persecuted and fought even to death "; as in the case of Peter, " who, through the envy of the wicked, incurred, not one or two, but many

dangers, and so passed to his place in glory after rendering his testimony," and Paul, " who showed the faithful the way to persevere to the end ; seven times was he imprisoned, he was banished, stoned, he went as a herald to the east and the west, and he reaped great glory by his faith. The whole world has attained to a knowledge of justice ; he went even to the farthest parts of the west, and gave his testimony before them that held power. Then was he taken out of the world and went to the holy place, the greatest model of patience." 1

It is clear that we have here no reference to the persecution of the Christians under Nero. It is not even stated that the apostles named met with a violent death on account of their faith, as the word " martyresas " (" after rendering his testimony ") need not by any means be understood to mean a testimony of blood, because the word " martyr " originally means only a witness to the truth of the Christian faith in the general sense, and is equivalent to " confessor," and was only later applied to those who sealed their faith by a violent death. 2 If the expression in the above text is usually taken to refer to the execution of the apostles under Nero, it is not because Clemens says anything about this execution, but merely because, according to Christian tradition, Peter and Paul are supposed to have been put to death at the time of the Neronian persecution.

This tradition, however, is not only relatively late, but extremely doubtful in itself. That Peter was never in Rome, and so did not meet his end there under Nero, must be regarded as certain after the research of Lipsius. 1 As regards Paul,

the tradition
is, according to Frey, 2 certainly not earlier
than the end
of the fifth century ; before that time it was
certainly
said that he and Peter died under Nero, but
not that Paul
was a victim of the Neronian persecution. 3

How, then,
could the Roman Clemens about the end of the
first
century connect the death of the two apostles with
the
Neronian persecution ? That he does so is
supposed to
be shown by the succeeding words, in which he
says :
" These men were accompanied on the heavenly
pil-
grimage by a great number of the elect, who have
given
us the noblest example of endurance in ill-
treatment and
torment, which they suffered from the envious. On
account of envy women were persecuted, Danaids
and
Dirces, and had to endure frightful and shameful
ill-
treatment; yet they maintained their faith firmly,
and
won a glorious reward, though they were feeble of
body."
" These words," says Arnold, in his work Die
Neronische
Christenverfolgung (1888), which supports the
genuine-
ness of Annals, xv, 44, " are seen at a glance to
be a
Christian complement of the description of Tacitus;
he
also speaks of ' most exquisite tortures,' of the
shame and
derision with which the victims were treated when
they
were put to death, and of the satisfaction it gave
to the
crowds' lust for spectacles." 4 But would Tacitus,
with
his well-known taste for spectacular stories of that
kind,
have refrained from giving us the ghastly picture
of the
Dirces torn on the horns of oxen? And what is the
meaning of these Danaids, in whose form Christian
women are said to have been shamed and put to
death ?
Can anyone seriously believe that the patient
water-
drawing daughters of Danaos would provide a
fitting

spectacle for the satisfaction of the crowd's lust for display and blood ? Or does the writer of the letter merely intend by the words " Danaids and Dirces," which have no connection with what precedes and follows in the text, to set the Christian women-martyrs in contrast to the frivolous performers of the ancient myth ? Further, what does he mean when he says that these numerous men and women were ill-treated " out of jealousy and envy," and puts the lot of the Christians in this respect on the same footing as that of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Moses and the Egyptians, Aaron and Miriam, Dathan and Abiram, and David and Saul ? Eenan suggests the hatred of the Jews for the Christians ; but Joel has successfully defended his co-religionists against such a charge, and Tacitus does not give it the least support. Arnold suggests " denunciations by Christians with party passions." 1 According to Lactantius, it was Nero's jealousy at the success of their propaganda that induced the emperor to persecute the Christians. But is it not possible that the writer of the letter had seen the Acts of Peter and other apocryphal writings, according to which Simon the magician, who had entered upon a struggle with Peter out of jealousy, may have been the cause of the persecution of the Christians ? And may not the whole ambiguous passage, with its rhetorical generalities, not really refer to the Neronian persecution, but rather throw back upon the time of Nero the martyrdoms that Christian men and women had suffered in later persecutions ? In any case, it does not follow from the letter of Clemens that the "number of the elect" who "had endured shame and torture on account of jealousy," and been " added

to the company " of the apostles Peter and Paul, died at the same time as they. This assumption arises simply from an association of ideas between the death of the apostles and the supposed Neronian persecution an association that in all probability did not exist in the time of Clemens. How could the supposed Clemens, about the year 95, make Peter and Paul die under Nero, when the former had never been in Eome, and the latter did not die until after 64 ? And how can the very scholars who dispute the presence of Peter in Eome and do not admit the death of Paul in the Neronian persecution regard the letter of Clemens as genuine, and as establishing the Neronian persecution ?

This, then, is the situation : either the letter of Clemens was really written about the year 95, and in that case the supposed reference to the Neronian persecution must, if it really is such, be regarded as a later interpolation ; or this reference is an original part of the letter, and in that case the letter cannot have been written until the tradition as to the death of the apostles in the Neronian persecution had taken shape that is to say, not before the middle of the second century. In either case, the so-called letter of Clemens is no evidence of the fact of a considerable persecution of the Christians under Nero. 1

1 As the reference of the part quoted to the Neronian persecution is the only detail for fixing the date of the letter, if we refuse to admit the passage the date of the letter is altogether uncertain, and it may belong to the fourth century just as well as the first the "great century of literary forgeries" (Antiqua Mater, p. 304).

Best wishes,

Pete



07-29-2008, 01:36 AM

#84

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
Location: Midwest
Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith**

Are you kidding me? 50 years is still living memory. Are you saying that Suetonius does not corroborate Tacitus?

Ben.

Yes, that's what I'm saying. 50 years is 10 lifetimes of urban legends.

50 years probably make *more* than 10 lifetimes of urban legend. That is not the point.

But I am probably not the best one on this thread to argue against your cynicism. Earl Doherty wrote:

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**

But was it Tacitus who got it wrong? One of the most reliable of Roman historians writing only four decades 'after the fact'?

For Earl, apparently, if only 40 years have passed, the usually reliable Tacitus should get the whole incident correct, almost without error. For you, apparently, if as many as 50 years have passed, Tacitus and Suetonius both may as well be passing down the tenth iteration of a sheer urban legend.

I will leave it to you two to sort all *that* out.

Ben.



07-29-2008, 04:42 AM

#85

spamandham

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2004
Location: Dallas, TX



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith**

For Earl, apparently, if only 40 years have passed,

Posts: 11,525

the usually reliable Tacitus should get the whole incident correct, almost without error. For you, apparently, if as many as 50 years have passed, Tacitus and Suetonius both may as well be passing down the tenth iteration of a sheer urban legend.

I don't see inconsistency in Tacitus' story, by itself, to be evidence of later interpolation. Nor have I formed an opinion on the matter. I'm exploring all sides.

There are several possibilities:

- the story is a complete fabrication inserted later
- some version of the story existed in the original text, which was later edited
- the story is genuine, but Tacitus got his facts wrong
- the story is both genuine and accurate, but other evidence which refutes it is wrong

To argue for the first point would require making the same argument in regard to Suetonius, which I don't think would be so hard.

*"During his reign many abuses were severely punished and put down, and no fewer new laws were made: a limit was set to expenditures; the public banquets were confined to a distribution of food; the sale of any kind of cooked viands in the taverns was forbidden, with the exception of pulse and vegetables, whereas before every sort of dainty was exposed for sale. **Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.** He put an end to the diversions of the chariot drivers, who from immunity of long standing claimed the right of ranging at large and amusing themselves by cheating and robbing the people. The pantomimic actors and their partisans were banished from the city."*

...Suetonius seems to be writing as if his audience wouldn't know who Christians were ("a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition"). This seems unlikely to me, since by Suetonius' time, Justin Martyr was writing letters to the emperor, and Christianity was geographically wide spread.

Further, the only fragment of this paragraph which is not the implementation of a new rule/law, is the one referring to punishment of Christians. So it's suspicious on 2 counts.



07-29-2008, 06:44 AM

#86

aa5874

Contributor

Join Date: Feb 2006

Location: the fringe of the



Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham**

caribbean
Posts: 18,988

...Suetonius seems to be writing as if his audience wouldn't know who Christians were ("a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition"). This seems unlikely to me, since by Suetonius' time, Justin Martyr was writing letters to the emperor, and Christianity was geographically wide spread.

But, were the "Christians," the class of men given to a new and mischeivous superstition, wide spread during the time of Nero?

The Christians mentioned by Justin were not only believers in Jesus, people were called Christians yet they themselves did not even call themselves Christians.

The word "Christian" is ambiguous and vague and does NOT have to mean believers of Jesus, the risen Saviour. It could mean believers in Simon or any unknown person who believes or is called Christ or the anointed.



07-29-2008, 06:55 AM

#87


spamandham

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2004
Location: Dallas, TX
Posts: 11,525



Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** 
The word "Christian" is ambiguous and vague and does NOT have to mean believers of Jesus, the risen Saviour. It could mean believers in Simon or any unknown person who believes or is called Christ or the anointed.

That doesn't matter to the context of this discussion. If there were multiple Christs, then Suetonius still treats them as one group and feels the need to explain who 'Christians' were. Either way, what Suetonius states about Christians seems out of place.



07-29-2008, 09:03 AM

#88

aa5874

Contributor


Join Date: Feb 2006
Location: the fringe of the caribbean
Posts: 18,988



Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham** 

Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** 
The word "Christian" is ambiguous and vague and does NOT have to mean believers of Jesus, the risen Saviour. It could mean believers in Simon or any unknown person who believes or is called Christ or the anointed.

That doesn't matter to the context of this discussion. If there were multiple Christs, then Suetonius still treats them as one group and feels the need to explain who 'Christians' were. Either way, what Suetonius states about Christians seems out of place.

It is not really reasonable to state that Suetonius' description is out of place. There is basically one sentence with the word Christians in all of the Life of Nero.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Life of Nero**
Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.

Couldn't it have been that Suetonius' source had a one-liner about those Christians too, and Suetonius just merely copied the sentence?

You cannot assume that there were multiple groups of Christians, there is just not enough information in Life of Nero to speculate.

All that can be noted are the differences or similarities in Tacitus and Suetonius.



07-29-2008, 09:18 AM

#89


andrewcriddle

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004
Location: Birmingham UK
Posts: 4,876



Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham** 
...Suetonius seems to be writing as if his audience wouldn't know who Christians were ("a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition"). This seems unlikely to me, since by Suetonius' time, Justin Martyr was writing letters to the emperor, and Christianity was geographically wide spread.

Suetonius is writing c 130 CE.
Justin is writing to the emperor after 150 CE.

Andrew Criddle



07-29-2008, 09:24 AM

#90

aa5874

Contributor

Join Date: Feb 2006
Location: the fringe of the caribbean




Quote:

Originally Posted by **andrewcriddle** 

Quote:

Posts: 18,988

Originally Posted by **spamandham** 

...Suetonius seems to be writing as if his audience wouldn't know who Christians were ("a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition"). This seems unlikely to me, since by Suetonius' time, Justin Martyr was writing letters to the emperor, and Christianity was geographically wide spread.

*Suetonius is writing c 130 CE.
Justin is writing to the emperor after 150 CE.*

Andrew Criddle

Do you mean Suetonius died at around 130 CE and wrote "Life of the Caesars" around 115 CE?



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07-29-2008, 09:46 AM

#91

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
Location: Ontario, Canada
Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
I am going to say this again, but only once; nobody is bound by your expectations. Your expectations are not an argument.

I disagree. It is an argument. I state "expectations" in the expectation (or hope) that I have at least a chance of persuading you and others that such expectations are reasonable and even compelling. It is what is at the basis of the argument from silence, reasonable expectations that are not fulfilled. Your retort is simply the same old tedious dismissal of the argument from silence that defenders always bring up, as though, not needing to say anything else, it is a slam dunk destroyer of any argument about expectation as to what we should find in a writer.

Moreover, I do not merely *state* my "expectations." I have argued them time and time again. Here you would have us believe that some notable scale of Christian persecution under Nero is somehow lying behind all those 'hints' which are yet somehow never given voice to. We never get examples of that unspoken and unclarified separate persecution other than the execution of the apostles and those in their company. I demonstrated clearly to you that in the Acts of Paul there is no separate persecution other than that attached to legends about Paul's persecution and death. Despite the clarity of the text, you wouldn't accept that but simply skipped around it. I make essentially the same demonstration about other writers. Your counter is simply, "I don't accept that." So what can we do? If you give nothing but a blanket refusal to heed any expectation on my part, no matter how it is argued, then we're in our "separate conceptual universes" situation, and that's as far as we can go.

You also keep referring to past posts where you claim to have demonstrated that the grammar (Latin/Greek or English? it's not clear) supports you and disproves me. I recall nothing of that nature and on looking back over those posts cannot find such. Whatever you have in mind, then, seems not to have struck me that way. But why not give me a clear example or two of it? Then we can see whether you are exaggerating or not. (Perhaps one of them is supposed to be the following?)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
I already argued, using tunc, that these specific executions (of Peter and Paul) are parts of a whole!

That's certainly not evident from the Scorpiace quote, since *tunc* as you yourself pointed out, can have an ambiguous application here. I'd take it in the opposite direction. The specific executions of Peter and Paul *are* the whole, since that's all we're ever given. Again, why does no one ever give us specifics about the *other* part of the "whole"?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
The whole point of the context here is that the churches in various locales have the authority to convey the apostolic tradition. The deaths of the apostles in these cities are relevant to this context. How is the death of Joe or Jane Christian relevant to this context?

This is trying to split hairs. The point is, it is yet another silent passage on anything to do with martyrdom outside Peter and Paul. You seem to think that an ad hoc argument for each one of them would suffice, but the argument is cumulative.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**

What was of interest to me was (A) the reason why Eusebius did not refer to Tacitus and (B) the fact that most of these authors envision a persecution not limited to the apostles.

That can't be a 'fact' since it is never stated, and we are never given details about that 'separate' persecution other than of people that can be attached to Peter and Paul. Surely, somewhere along the line, we could expect—yes, have an "expectation"—that some writer would make your preferred option clear and give us something which, no matter how remotely, resembled Tacitus.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**

Could be? Sure, could be. Except that Tertullian is backed up by, for example, Suetonius!

Maybe yes, maybe no. "Punishment was inflicted upon the Christians" is hardly necessarily on the scale of Tacitus' Neronian persecution, or even anything identifiably like it. And I think I included in a past post my examination of Suetonius' sentence about Christians and how uncertain it is. Actually, I guess I didn't, so here it is:

Quote:

Another Look at Suetonius

We are, of course, engaging in a good degree of speculation, but it is speculation grounded in the texts. It would reasonably account for the very strange situation encountered in the record in regard to evolving Christian attitudes toward some form of persecution under Nero and their long-delayed awareness of a link to the great fire. Some of that speculation is affected by the only pagan witness we have outside of Tacitus to the situation in question, the brief sentence we looked at earlier in Suetonius' Life of Nero: "Punishment [supplicio] was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition."

It seems incredible, as we've noted before, that if this 'punishment' was in regard to something as dramatic as the accusation that they had burned down the city of Rome, Suetonius would have given no indication of it. The word "supplicio" has a range of application and does not always apply to an execution. While it always signifies something more than a slap on the wrist, Suetonius may have used it here in an unspecific way, perhaps because he knew few if any details about exactly what those "Christians" had

undergone. As noted before, it is hardly likely he was paraphrasing Tacitus with its vivid and sanguinary depictions.

Furthermore, if we look back on the context of this sentence, "punishment" as referring to death, let alone the Tacitean scene of mass slaughter, would be grossly out of place, a monstrous weed in a dandelion patch. The paragraph is introduced by the comment that under Nero, "many and harsh were the punishments and curbs." What were those 'harsh punishments and curbs'? Setting a limit to expenditures, restricting public banquets and forbidding the sale of meat in taverns, curbing the liberties taken by the chariot drivers in the city, some of whom were scam artists, and banning pantomime actors. Dropped into the middle of this, right after a reference to the proscription against selling "every sort of dainty" in taverns, comes our "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians..." Apparently Suetonius could make the leap from barroom overindulgence in sweets to the torture and massacre of thousands of people, after barely a pause for breath. The utter destruction of almost the entire city—if that is what lay in the background of his thought—is apparently on the same level of atrocity as state overspending and chomping on hamburgers in the taverns.

The more one tries to read into that intrusive sentence in the direction of a Tacitean diorama of conflagration and butchery, the more it cries out interpolation. And maybe that is so. But if it can be reduced in scope to the level of some form of disorder or a curbing of Christian or Jewish activities in the city by Nero, the more secure would be its position in the paragraph. At the same time, it would fit more cleanly into the picture just drawn of the evolution of some minor situation during the reign of Nero, whether originally noted by Tacitus or not, into the full-blown blood-soaked drama set against the backdrop of a burned out metropolis, a development which seems to postdate Eusebius.

Earl Doherty



07-29-2008, 09:51 AM

#92

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
Location: Ontario, Canada
Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **ynquirer**
The point is that Suetonius corroborates the persecution – whether actual or an urban legend – to be not a later invention, and that there was reason for the narrative to be there, exactly where

it is.

The point is that Suetonius does *not* corroborate Tacitus' persecution. Suetonius does not make his cryptic "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians..." in conjunction with the fire. Nor does he say enough about it to tell us the scale of it, or even its nature, much less the reason for it. And it is even questionable as fitting within its own context. From what that context indicates, the Christians could have been given a few whippings for holding too many noisy parties late at night. And if Suetonius supposedly corroborates Tacitus on anything resembling the Tacitean scale, or even on any kind of notable persecution of Christians, why does Cassius Dio not have a word to say about it? Like Suetonius, he gives his own detailed description of the fire, but with no mention of Christians in connection with it.

Suetonius in no way corroborates the Tacitus passage, and in fact his treatment (not connected to the fire, not providing any hint of a scale in keeping with Tacitus' account) argues against Tacitus being a reliable passage in regard to the involvement of the Christians. That has been my sole purpose in all this. And if so many others also give us texts which fail to corroborate Tacitus in regard to those two things, the Tacitus passage goes down the drain for any usefulness in being a witness to an historical Jesus. The only thing salvageable from 15:44 is the description of the fire itself. Not even a simple fact of 'persecution of Christians unconnected with an alleged responsibility for the fire' can be secure. That's desperation. Tacitus simply wouldn't have gotten it that wrong.

In that connection, Ben had this to say:

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
For Earl, apparently, if only 40 years have passed, the usually reliable Tacitus should get the whole incident correct, almost without error.

The whole incident correct? He didn't get **any** of it correct! If Tacitus, after a mere 40 years, had on his own incompetence turned a mild 'punishment' of Christians which had nothing to do with the fire into his Neronian gore-fest slaughtering in unspeakable ways hundreds of arsonists who had burned down half the city, he would have been utterly worthless as an historian. The rest of his work would have been shot through with incompetent errors as well, and he would have no reputation at all among either ancients or moderns.

This is simply Ben desperate to absolve Tacitus of the unabsolvable, and cling to some shred of reliability in his reference to an historical Christ.

Earl Doherty



07-29-2008, 10:18 AM

#93

andrewcriddle

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004
 Location: Birmingham UK
 Posts: 4,876



Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **andrewcriddle**

*Suetonius is writing c 130 CE.
 Justin is writing to the emperor after 150
 CE.*

Andrew Criddle

*Do you mean Suetonius died at around 130 CE and
 wrote "Life of the Caesars" around 115 CE?*

There seems to be little hard evidence as to exactly when Suetonius wrote the "Twelve Caesars" and basically none as to his date of death.

I was basing my date on the widely held guess that Suetonius finally found the time to complete the "Twelve Caesars" after he was sacked from his senior government job around 121 CE. (Even so 130 is probably too late 125 may be more likely.)

Andrew Criddle



07-29-2008, 10:34 AM

#94

aa5874

Contributor

Join Date: Feb 2006
 Location: the fringe of the
 caribbean
 Posts: 18,988



Quote:

Originally Posted by **andrewcriddle**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874**

*Do you mean Suetonius died at around 130
 CE and wrote "Life of the Caesars" around
 115 CE?*

*There seems to be little hard evidence as to
 exactly when Suetonius wrote the "Twelve
 Caesars" and basically none as to his date of
 death.*

*I was basing my date on the widely held guess
 that Suetonius finally found the time to complete
 the "Twelve Caesars" after he was sacked from his
 senior government job around 121 CE. (Even so
 130 is probably too late 125 may be more likely.)*

Andrew Criddle

You mean you don't know when Suetonius wrote the "Twelve Caesars"? Guesswork does not make 125 CE more likely.



07-29-2008, 11:13 AM

#95


Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
Location: Midwest
Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
Here you would have us believe that some notable scale of Christian persecution under Nero is somehow lying behind all those 'hints' which are yet somehow never given voice to.

I do not know exactly what scale, other than that it included more than the two martyred apostles (however, see below). Which I have demonstrated, and you have accepted.

Quote:

I demonstrated clearly to you that in the Acts of Paul there is no separate persecution other than that attached to legends about Paul's persecution and death.

You demonstrated no such thing. You opined it. Yes, the persecutions stem in that document from an encounter between Paul and Nero. Does that mean that its author knew only of the death of Paul and made up the others? Or does that mean that its author knew both of the death of Paul and of the death of others and connected the two, however artificially? You assumed the former; you never argued for it, or against the latter.

Quote:

[Y]ou give nothing but a blanket refusal to heed any expectation on my part, no matter how it is argued, then we're in our "separate conceptual universes" situation, and that's as far as we can go.

Now even you find yourself using that phrase. I feel compelled to agree. I have no idea what you find persuasive about the arguments you have given here.

Quote:

You also keep referring to past posts where you claim to have demonstrated that the grammar (Latin/Greek or English? it's not clear) supports you and disproves me. I recall nothing of that nature and on looking back over those posts

cannot find such. Whatever you have in mind, then, seems not to have struck me that way. But why not give me a clear example or two of it?

I boldfaced the relevant parts of Eusebius. Let me do it again, this time with the Greek:

But with all these things this particular in the catalogue of his crimes was still wanting, that he was the first of the emperors who showed himself an enemy of the divine religion. The Roman Tertullian is likewise a witness of this. He writes as follows: Examine your records. There you will find that Nero was the first that persecuted this doctrine, particularly then when after subduing all the east, he exercised his cruelty against all at Rome. We glory in having such a man the leader in our punishment. For whoever knows him can understand that nothing was condemned by Nero unless it was something of great excellence. *Thus [ταυτη] having been announced [ανακηρυχθεις] as the first among the principal enemies of God, he was led on [ενηρθη] to the slaughter of the apostles.*

Here the persecution described in the quotation of Tertullian must be what is referred back to by the **ταυτη**; there is nothing else it can refer to. And the participle is in the aorist, indicating time prior. Having been heralded as the enemy of God (by means of persecuting Christians), he was led on to kill the apostles. The one necessarily precedes the other. They are separate (though obviously related) entities.

Quote:

That's certainly not evident from the Scorpiace quote, since *tunc* as you yourself pointed out, can have an ambiguous application here.

!!

I gave two possible meanings of *tunc*. The first supports me without argument, since, if it means *next*, Tertullian is saying that Christians were put to the sword and then **next** Peter and Paul were, too.

The second supports me, also, since *at that time* implies an event to which the apostolic martyrdoms belong, and that event, from context, can only be the persecution of Christians.

It is the same in the Severus passage, where *tum* is used (*tunc* being a form of *tum*, and used interchangeably with it):

At that time [*tum*] Paul and Peter were condemned to capital punishment, of whom the one was beheaded with a sword, while Peter

suffered crucifixion.

At that time. At *which* time? Severus has just described the persecution of not a few (yet uncounted) Christians. Now, at that time [*tum*], the time of the persecutions, Paul and Peter were also persecuted.

Which way of taking *tunc* would you prefer? The one that kills your hypothesis quickly? Or the one that does it slowly? Had Tertullian meant to state or imply that the persecutions consisted precisely of the executions of Peter and Paul, *tunc* was not the word to use.

Quote:

Again, why does no one ever give us specifics about the *other* part of the "whole"?

Because the other part is nameless. Just plain ordinary Christians. It was the apostles who got top billing in Christian circles.

Quote:

This is trying to split hairs. The point is, it is yet another silent passage on anything to do with martyrdom outside Peter and Paul.

I ask you again: How is the death of Joe and Jane Christian relevant to what Tertullian has to say in the *Prescription*? He writes:

Come now, you who would indulge a better curiosity, if you would apply it to the business of your salvation, run over the apostolic churches, in which the very thrones of the apostles are still pre-eminent in their places, in which their own authentic writings are read, uttering the voice and representing the face of each of them severally.

Of *course* this is a silent passage. This must be one of those *different conceptual universe* things. You seem to expect to find the deaths of nonapostles mentioned in a passage explicitly about apostles. And I have no idea why.
:huh:

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
What was of interest to me was (A) the reason why Eusebius did not refer to Tacitus and (B) the fact that most of these authors envision a persecution not limited to the apostles.

Quote:

That can't be a 'fact' since it is never stated....

So now, not only are the other executions in the Acts of

Paul explained as inventions by the author, but they do not even exist. I dealt with Tertullian (*tunc*) and Eusebius earlier. It may be implicit in Tertullian; it is explicit in Eusebius.

Quote:

...and we are never given details about that 'separate' persecution other than of people that can be attached to Peter and Paul.

The last line is nothing but weasel words. Of *course* all the deaths can be attached to Peter and Paul; they suffered in the same persecution.

Quote:

"Punishment was inflicted upon the Christians" is hardly necessarily on the scale of Tacitus' Neronian persecution....

Again with the scale! I repeat myself: The *only* scale that I am arguing is that the persecutions were not limited to the apostles. It may have been three guys, all cousins of Peter, one of whom was going to die of cancer anyway, but our authors are *not* just pegging Peter and Paul alone.

I doubt the persecution was that limited. Let us examine another source that we have not yet looked at. In Revelation 13 there is little doubt that the beast is Nero coming back (the so-called *Nero redivivus* motif). The number of the beast (666), the alternate textual tradition of that number (616), the very name beast (compare *Apollonius of Tyana* by Philostratus), and other indicators are unmistakable.

What is expected of this Nero, whether present or future? He makes war with the saints so as to overcome them, and authority over all the earth is given to him. As many as do not worship the image are killed.

Is this expectation of a widespread persecution based solely on the executions of Peter and Paul? I think not. I think Nero was remembered as a savage persecutor of Christians in general (not to mention others, including his own mother!), not just of Peter and Paul, who do not appear in Revelation.

Or let us consider *Ascension of Isaiah* 4.2-3:

After it is consummated, Beliar the great ruler, the king of this world, will descend, he who has ruled it since it came into being; yea, he will descend from his firmament in the likeness of a man, a lawless king, the slayer of his mother; this king will himself persecute the plant which the twelve apostles of the beloved have planted. Of the twelve one will be delivered into his hands.

What is the plant which the twelve apostles have planted? Just Paul? I think not; it is clearly Christianity at large. Again the general persecution is summarized in its own terms, and again the death of an apostle is mentioned as a part of that persecution.

Quote:

The whole incident correct? He didn't get any of it correct!

I think he did, though I cannot verify every detail.

Ben.



07-29-2008, 03:45 PM

#96

spamandham

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2004
Location: Dallas, TX
Posts: 11,525



Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** [▶](#)
It is not really reasonable to state that Suetonius' description is out of place. There is basically one sentence with the word Christians in all of the Life of Nero.

I explained the rationale behind the claim that it was out of place, and that rationale had nothing to do with the word 'Christian'. I don't know what point you're trying to make.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** [▶](#)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Life of Nero**
Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.

Couldn't it have been that Suetonius' source had a one-liner about those Christians too, and Suetonius just merely copied the sentence?

Yes, that's possible. ...and yet, the sentence seems out of place regardless. Did you read the 2 points I made?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** [▶](#)
You cannot assume that there were multiple groups of Christians, there is just not enough information in Life of Nero to speculate.

I'm not speculating one way or the other. I'm merely pointing out that Suetonius refers to 'Christians' as if they

were one group - regardless of whether there were 0 or 1000 people running around claiming to be the Christ, with 0, 1, or dozens of unrelated sects involved.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** [▶](#)
All that can be noted are the differences or similarities in Tacitus and Suetonius.

I disagree. I think we can also examine the texts for internal consistency, for interrupted thought processes that indicated possible interpolation, for consistency with known writing styles, etc.



07-29-2008, 03:48 PM

#97

spamandham

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2004
 Location: Dallas, TX
 Posts: 11,525



Quote:

Originally Posted by **andrewcriddle** [▶](#)
*Suetonius is writing c 130 CE.
 Justin is writing to the emperor after 150 CE.*
 Andrew Criddle

20-30 years is close enough for government work, unless there's a reason to suspect a sudden change in the status of Christianity in the interim.



07-29-2008, 04:04 PM

#98

aa5874

Contributor

Join Date: Feb 2006
 Location: the fringe of the caribbean
 Posts: 18,988



Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham** [▶](#)
I disagree. I think we can also examine the texts for internal consistency, for interrupted thought processes that indicated possible interpolation, for consistency with known writing styles, etc.

I am dealing specifically with the single sentence about Christians in Suetonius' "Life of Nero". There is just not enough information to make any reasonable determination, unless you just want to guess.

It is already accepted that texts can be internally examined for contradictions and inconsistencies.



07-29-2008, 04:28 PM

#99

spamandham

Contributor




Quote:

Join Date: Mar 2004
Location: Dallas, TX
Posts: 11,525

Originally Posted by **aa5874** 

Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham** 
I disagree. I think we can also examine the texts for internal consistency, for interrupted thought processes that indicated possible interpolation, for consistency with known writing styles, etc.

I am dealing specifically with the single sentence about Christians in Suetonius' "Life of Nero". There is just not enough information to make any reasonable determination, unless you just want to guess.

It is already accepted that texts can be internally examined for contradictions and inconsistencies.

You have not addressed either of the two points I made regarding reasons to suspect interpolation, so I'm guessing you didn't read [that post](#).



 07-29-2008, 04:45 PM

#100

aa5874

Contributor

Join Date: Feb 2006
Location: the fringe of the caribbean
Posts: 18,988



Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham** 

Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** 

I am dealing specifically with the single sentence about Christians in Suetonius' "Life of Nero". There is just not enough information to make any reasonable determination, unless you just want to guess.

It is already accepted that texts can be internally examined for contradictions and inconsistencies.

You have not addressed either of the two points I made regarding reasons to suspect interpolation, so I'm guessing you didn't read [that post](#).

I did already read your post, and I just cannot make any determination whether or not the passage was interpolated or genuine.

As I have said before, the only reasonable position I can maintain, using Justin Martyr, is that the word Christians, as used in The Life of Nero, is ambiguous. It may not mean believers in Jesus Christ of Nazareth.



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Is the Forgery of Tacitus' Annals in the Renaissance an Untenable Position?

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07-29-2008, 04:49 PM

#101

[spamandham](#)

Contributor

Join Date: Mar 2004
Location: Dallas, TX
Posts: 11,525



Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874**

As I have said before, the only reasonable position I can maintain, using Justin Martyr, is that the word Christians, as used in The Life of Nero, is ambiguous. It may not mean believers in Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Ok, I can accept that. Now, based on what Suetonius wrote, how many groups of 'Christians' was he aware of?



07-29-2008, 05:51 PM

#102

[aa5874](#)




Contributor

Join Date: Feb 2006
 Location: the fringe of the
 caribbean
 Posts: 18,988

Quote:

Originally Posted by **spamandham** 

Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** 
As I have said before, the only reasonable position I can maintain, using Justin Martyr, is that the word Christians, as used in The Life of Nero, is ambiguous. It may not mean believers in Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Ok, I can accept that. Now, based on what Suetonius wrote, how many groups of 'Christians' was he aware of?

Suetonius was writing or is believed to have written at around 115 CE about events that occurred before he was born.

I cannot tell you with any reasonable certainty how many groups of Christians Suentonius was aware of during the time of Nero, before Suetonius was born.

Again, perhaps Suetonius merely copied the information about the Christians from some source.



07-29-2008, 06:06 PM

#103

spamandham

Contributor


Join Date: Mar 2004
 Location: Dallas, TX
 Posts: 11,525



Quote:

Originally Posted by **spam**
Now, based on what Suetonius wrote, how many groups of 'Christians' was he aware of?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** 
I cannot tell you with any reasonable certainty how many groups of Christians Suentonius was aware of during the time of Nero, before Suetonius was born.

Again, perhaps Suetonius merely copied the information about the Christians from some source.

It seems to me, that if you posit that what he is purported to have written, was actualy written by him, the answer to this question is trivial, regardless of what he may have used as a source.



07-29-2008, 06:50 PM

#104

ynquirer

Senior Member

Join Date: Sep 2005
 Location: Madrid, Spain
 Posts: 572



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **ynquirer**

The point is that Suetonius corroborates the persecution – whether actual or an urban legend – to be not a later invention, and that there was reason for the narrative to be there, exactly where it is.

The point is that Suetonius does not corroborate Tacitus' persecution. Suetonius does not make his cryptic "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians..." in conjunction with the fire. Nor does he say enough about it to tell us the scale of it, or even its nature, much less the reason for it. And it is even questionable as fitting within its own context. From what that context indicates, the Christians could have been given a few whippings for holding too many noisy parties late at night. And if Suetonius supposedly corroborates Tacitus on anything resembling the Tacitean scale, or even on any kind of notable persecution of Christians, why does Cassius Dio not have a word to say about it? Like Suetonius, he gives his own detailed description of the fire, but with no mention of Christians in connection with it.

Suetonius in no way corroborates the Tacitus passage, and in fact his treatment (not connected to the fire, not providing any hint of a scale in keeping with Tacitus' account) argues against Tacitus being a reliable passage in regard to the involvement of the Christians. That has been my sole purpose in all this. And if so many others also give us texts which fail to corroborate Tacitus in regard to those two things, the Tacitus passage goes down the drain for any usefulness in being a witness to an historical Jesus. The only thing salvageable from 15:44 is the description of the fire itself. Not even a simple fact of 'persecution of Christians unconnected with an alleged responsibility for the fire' can be secure. That's desperation. Tacitus simply wouldn't have gotten it that wrong.

Earl Doherty

Focus is different on both, and so is, per force, the emphasis laid down by each one. Tacitus seems mainly concerned with the human side of the persecution, and that is why he highlights the sufferings inflicted on the victims. Suetonius, instead, gives relevance to the legal side: an abuse was being perpetrated and Nero suppressed it. Period.

Note that persecution of the Christians is listed by

Suetonius among the positive accomplishments of Nero, while his cruelties are depicted much later in the text. It would have been an inconsistency to mix accomplishments with cruelty in dealing with this particular item, and that is probably the reason why Suetonius does not mention the fire and the Christians' alleged participation in it.

It is up to the reader to understand that Suetonius *condones* the means used by Nero to achieve the desired outcome, which Tacitus obviously does not. This explains away differences in emphasis.

In point of fact, Suetonius fully corroborates that there was a persecution, of which he chooses not to give *any* detail.



07-30-2008, 05:24 AM

#105

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
Location: Ontario, Canada
Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**
I demonstrated clearly to you that in the Acts of Paul there is no separate persecution other than that attached to legends about Paul's persecution and death.

You demonstrated no such thing. You opined it. Yes, the persecutions stem in that document from an encounter between Paul and Nero. Does that mean that its author knew only of the death of Paul and made up the others? Or does that mean that its author knew both of the death of Paul and of the death of others and connected the two, however artificially? You assumed the former; you never argued for it, or against the latter.

"Opined it"??? Is it mere opinion when you point to a text and demonstrate what it actually says? That's **argument**, Ben, not opinion. And when what is demonstrated conforms to the claim I am making, and to the opposite of your claim, that's **evidence** in my favor. Whereas all you are doing is speculating on some other knowledge that could lie in the writer's background, with no evidence in the text in favor of it. Surely you can see that this is **fallacy**, no better than on the level of all those claims that there could be some lost letter of Paul that said clearly that his Jesus was a recent man. The text of the Acts of Paul doesn't allow for your claim, doesn't even suggest the possibility, and you expect me to argue against that?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**

It is the same in the Severus passage, where tum is used (tunc being a form of tum, and used interchangeably with it):

At that time [tum] Paul and Peter were condemned to capital punishment, of whom the one was beheaded with a sword, while Peter suffered crucifixion.

At that time. At which time? Severus has just described the persecution of not a few (yet uncounted) Christians. Now, at that time [tum], the time of the persecutions, Paul and Peter were also persecuted.

Precisely. Severus has indeed "just described the persecution of not a few Christians." In other words, he has given us what all other commentators before him lack: an account of a separate persecution, clearly and in detail, distinguishable from that of Peter and Paul and those in their company. Are you going to claim that his use of *tum* can reach back across the centuries and impose the same meaning on Tertullian and Eusebius that even you admit is ambiguous? I don't think so.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
The second [use of tunc] supports me, also, since at that time implies an event to which the apostolic martyrdoms belong, and that event, from context, can only be the persecution of Christians.

I don't see that at all. You are being circular. What the apostolic martyrdoms belong to is the unspecific statement about Nero being an enemy to the Christian religion. "At the time of him being such an enemy"—in other words, what constituted it (at least its dramatic element), is his execution of Peter and Paul and perhaps a few others linked to them. Perhaps if there is anything else lurking there as well, it was some kind of proscription. Anything else is *your* "expectation", unsupported by evidence in the texts.

As far as your specific quote (with Greek bolding), this is more of the same. You are forcing a meaning into a couple of simple words which it does not necessarily have, and only by means of very strained reasoning. Note, first of all, that these are Eusebius' words, even though he has said that Tertullian "writes as follows." I pointed out that Eusebius' "quote" does not conform in important details to the extant Tertullian passage.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Eusebius**
Examine your records. There you will find that Nero was the first that persecuted this doctrine, particularly then when after subduing all the east, he exercised his cruelty against all at Rome. We

glory in having such a man the leader in our punishment. For whoever knows him can understand that nothing was condemned by Nero unless it was something of great excellence...

Now, first of all we lack here any clear reference to a slaughter of Christians or details about it. Moreover, this is Eusebius quoting Tertullian, and as well him, or someone before him, putting words into his mouth. ("after subduing all the east, he exercised his cruelty against all at Rome" does not appear in Tertullian.) Therefore, Eusebius is *understanding* Tertullian in a certain way, which Tertullian himself does not convey. That misquoted remark *may* (the line could have other interpretations less specific than a persecution of Christians) imply for Eusebius a general persecution of Christians, but the point is, *he has no other source of knowledge* for that implication than this misquoted Tertullian. He does not offer us any example of such a thing on his own and confines his own examples of a Neronian persecution to Peter and Paul. So there is no independent evidence in Eusebius of a knowledge of your 'separate' persecution. It is *not* "explicit in Eusebius." As a consequence of all this, your pointing to "Thus [*tautē*]" and the verb being in the aorist cannot bear the weight of the meaning you are trying to draw from them. Your "grammar" has not proven anything.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
The last line is nothing but weasel words. Of course all the deaths can be attached to Peter and Paul; they suffered in the same persecution.

And you know that this is not what I'm trying to imply. I'm talking about the death of other Christians which are described in the texts themselves, such as those in the Acts of Paul: the other Christians which Nero has rounded up solely on the basis of Paul's words to him, as part of the legend attached to Paul's martyrdom. In fact, if the author of that document speaks only about other Christians being persecuted in that particular connection, that in itself speaks to a lack of knowledge on his part of any Christians persecuted by Nero which lay outside the circumstances which he portrays.

Earl Doherty



07-30-2008, 05:29 AM

#106

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
 Location: Ontario, Canada
 Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **ynquirer**
Note that persecution of the Christians is listed by Suetonius among the positive accomplishments of Nero, while his cruelties are depicted much later in the text. It would have been an inconsistency to

mix accomplishments with cruelty in dealing with this particular item, and that is probably the reason why Suetonius does not mention the fire and the Christians' alleged participation in it.

I've seen this before, and it's a good example of the over-subtle and dubious sophisticated reasoning indulged in by too many modern scholars to try to explain why a text doesn't seem to say the things we would normally expect it to say. Is such a rigid categorization of details supposedly relating to "positive" accomplishments of Nero and of details supposedly relating to his cruelty, and the "inconsistency" of mixing the two, supposed to have trumped for Suetonius the much more blatant inconsistency of not mentioning the persecution of Christians as arsonists in the great fire *at the same time as he mentions the great fire*? As I've said before, give me a break. These sorts of 'explanations' do not stand up to scrutiny, especially scrutiny that allows common sense to be introduced.

Earl Doherty



07-30-2008, 06:26 AM

#107

andrewcriddle

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004
Location: Birmingham UK
Posts: 4,876



Quote:

Originally Posted by **aa5874** [▶](#)

[
You mean you don't know when Suetonius wrote the "Twelve Caesars"? Guesswork does not make 125 CE more likely.

I don't **know** exactly when the "Twelve Caesars" was written.

However there is some limited support fo the idea that Suetonius was in the middle of writing it when he got sacked. A number of scholars hold that Suetonius seems to have been able to make use of confidential official documents in the very early lives in a way that is not true of the later ones.

His access to such sources may have ceased when he lost his position in the Imperial household.

Andrew Criddle



07-30-2008, 06:42 AM

#108

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
Location: Midwest
Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** [▶](#)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben, letter notations added**

Yes, the persecutions stem in that document from an encounter between Paul and Nero. Does that mean [A] that its author knew only of the death of Paul and made up the others? Or does that mean [B] that its author knew both of the death of Paul and of the death of others and connected the two, however artificially? You assumed the former; you never argued for it, or against the latter.

"Opined it"??? Is it mere opinion when you point to a text and demonstrate what it actually says?

Okay, where did you argue against **B** above? What did you say that cut that option off?

Quote:

Are you going to claim that his use of *tum* can reach back across the centuries and impose the same meaning on Tertullian and Eusebius that even you admit is ambiguous? I don't think so.

No, I am claiming that this is how *tum* (or *tunc*) is used. I gave you a clear case (Severus) to illuminate the less clear (Tertullian).

The thing is, I argued that either of the two main uses of *tunc* supports the executions of Peter and Paul belonging to a persecution; you did not read my argument closely enough to even realize that this is what I was doing; instead, you said that I had already acknowledged that *tunc* can go either way!

Think of Tertullian now. If you cannot read my contemporary English prose closely enough to realize what I am saying, how can you be expected to read his ancient Latin prose closely enough to realize what he is saying?

Quote:

What the apostolic martyrdoms belong to is the unspecific statement about Nero being an enemy to the Christian religion. "At the time of him being such an enemy"—in other words, what constituted it (at least its dramatic element), is his execution of Peter and Paul and perhaps a few others linked to them.

Here is the text (again):

Thus [ταυτη] having been announced [ανακηρυχθεις] as the first among the principal enemies of God, he was led on [επηρθη] to the slaughter of the apostles.

Now, it sounds like you are saying that Nero was announced as an enemy of God by his killing of the apostles, and then, after being so announced, he was led on to kill the apostles.

What I am saying is that these are two separate things; they have to be. The announcement as the enemy of God *precedes* the killing of the apostles; thus it cannot *be* the killing of the apostles.

Quote:

Perhaps if there is anything else lurking there as well, it was some kind of proscription.

Some kind of proscription... against Christians?

Quote:

You are forcing a meaning into a couple of simple words which it does not necessarily have....

I am reading an aorist participle as time prior and an adverb of manner as, well, as manner. What exactly is your complaint about this?

Quote:

I pointed out that Eusebius' "quote" does not conform in important details to the extant Tertullian passage.

For 3 points, can you tell me *why* (in the judgment of scholars) the quotation does not conform very well?

Quote:

So there is no independent evidence in Eusebius of a knowledge of your 'separate' persecution. It is not "explicit in Eusebius."

Of *course* Eusebius is dependent upon Tertullian. That was never at issue. You are confusing (A) knowledge of a separate persecution with (B) knowledge of a separate persecution independent of Tertullian. I never even tried to argue the latter. I think Tertullian *is* his main (trusted) source for the event, and he clearly reads Tertullian as saying that there was a persecution that included the apostolic executions. He clearly does not read Tertullian as saying that the whole affair consisted *only* (your word, remember) of the apostolic executions.

(Eusebius probably also knew the martyrdom scene from the Acts of Paul, but would not be inclined to quote that text authoritatively.)

Quote:

As a consequence of all this, your pointing to "Thus [tautē]" and the verb being in the aorist cannot

bear the weight of the meaning you are trying to draw from them. Your "grammar" has not proven anything.

No, it proved that you were mistaken when you wrote:

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**
Eusebius... focuses on a persecution by Nero which relates only to the apostles Peter and Paul.

To the contrary, Eusebius reads Tertullian (his main or perhaps only source) as saying that there was a general persecution (*having thus been announced as one of the principal enemies of God*) of which the executions of Peter and Paul were a part. That is what all of this has been about. In the process of defending this indefensible sentence, you have misconstrued my intentions, shown surprise at views of mine that I have held for years, erected strawmen in my honor, and burnt them in effigy.

Quote:

And you know that this is not what I'm trying to imply.

Heavens, no, I do not know that. All I have in my possession as an insight into your intended meaning is your dense, rhetorical, almost impenetrable prose.

Quote:

I'm talking about the death of other Christians which are described in the texts themselves, such as those in the Acts of Paul: the other Christians which Nero has rounded up solely on the basis of Paul's words to him, as part of the legend attached to Paul's martyrdom.

You are slipping that last bit in as if you have argued for it, but in fact you have not. Again, how do you *know* that the author of the Acts of Paul did not know of the general persecution and of the martyrdom of Paul, and simply connected them artificially? How do you *know* that he invented those other martyrs or persecuted Christians on his own accord, rather than finding them in texts or traditions and interpreting them as the result of a run-in with Paul? His making them subject to an encounter between Nero and Paul no more makes them his own invention than Tacitus possibly artificially connecting the fire with the persecution makes either of those events questionable. People make connections that were not there originally; they simply do. Heck, *you* do it all the time. 😊

And what about the *Ascension of Isaiah* and Revelation? No comments on those?

Ben.



08-02-2008, 04:31 PM

#109

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005

Location: Ontario, Canada

Posts: 1,435



OK, let's try this one more time. (And I'm doing this as much to ensure that I get everything straight in my own mind as much as possible, and find the best way to lay it out.)

First look at Tertullian, Apology 5:

Quote:

Tiberius, accordingly, in whose days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligence from Palestine of events which had clearly shown the truth of Christ's divinity, brought the matter before the senate, with his own decision in favor of Christ. The senate, because it had not given the approval itself, rejected his proposal. Caesar held to his opinion, threatening wrath against all accusers of the Christians. Consult your histories; you will there find that Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect, making progress then especially at Rome. But we glory in having our condemnation hallowed by the hostility of such a wretch. For any one who knows him, can understand that not except as being of singular excellence did anything bring on it Nero's condemnation.

There is nothing in the above passage of Tertullian that even hints at your 'two-stage solution'. Nothing that specifies something which first took place, and then that something else took place.

What, then, is the "Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect"? That, as I explained, is revealed by two other passages in Tertullian.

Quote:

Scorpiace 15: We read the lives of the Caesars: At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. Then (*tunc*) is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross. Then (*tunc*) does Paul obtain a birth suited to Roman citizenship, when in Rome he springs to life again ennobled by martyrdom. Wherever I read of these occurrences, so soon as I do so I learn to suffer; nor does it signify to me which I follow as teachers of martyrdom, whether the declarations or the deaths of the apostles, save that in their deaths I recall their declarations also.

"Tunc" (as you yourself pointed out) can mean "at that time". At what time? At the time that Nero stained with

blood the rising faith. While it can also mean 'next' or 'and then', if he had meant the latter, he could have used "postea". Since he gives not the slightest other detail of the "staining with blood," Peter and Paul as constituting the staining with blood is the more natural alternative, especially when he then goes on to speak of those he has learned from about martyrdom, and once again *all he speaks of is Peter and Paul*.

I pointed out the passage in *De Praescriptione* 36, where Tertullian mentions only the martyrdom of apostles. You had a technicality to get around that (unlike with either of the above), yet it is still a silence on any martyrdom other than apostles. So, the point here is that this passage gives your claim no support either, not even a "hint" of one.

So far we have nothing to indicate that Tertullian possessed any concept of a wider persecution of Christians outside of apostles. Can I get you to agree on that at least? If not, on what basis *in Tertullian* do you disagree?

Now you seem to be trying to put all your chips on Eusebius. I'll use your earlier posting of H.E. 2.25:

Quote:

But with all these things this particular in the catalogue of his crimes was still wanting, that he was the first of the emperors who showed himself an enemy of the divine religion. The Roman Tertullian is likewise a witness of this. He writes as follows: Examine your records. There you will find that Nero was the first that persecuted this doctrine, particularly then when after subduing all the east, he exercised his cruelty against all at Rome. We glory in having such a man the leader in our punishment. For whoever knows him can understand that nothing was condemned by Nero unless it was something of great excellence. Thus [ταυτη] having been announced [ανακηρυχθεις] as the first among the principal enemies of God, he was led on [επηρθη] to the slaughter of the apostles.

I made the point that the line in Eusebius quoting Tertullian, "Study your records: there you will find that Nero was the first to persecute this teaching when, after subjugating the entire East, in Rome especially he treated everyone with savagery," is hardly to be equated with what Tertullian actually said. I suggested that the passage had been corrupted, perhaps interpolated, perhaps misconstrued in some way by the time it reached Eusebius. On further research on this matter, I can accept that the variance between the two texts was almost certainly the result of an incompetent translator from Tertullian's Latin into Greek, the Greek which Eusebius is quoting. This does not change the fact that Eusebius' understanding of the matter was based on that incompetent Greek translation. But what was that understanding?

First of all, understanding a separate persecution by Nero from that of the apostles is not possible from the Latin original of Tertullian. That I believe I established above. From the garbled Greek translation, could Eusebius have interpreted it otherwise, that there *was* some kind of separate persecution of others besides the apostles? (Let me point out that if he did, that cannot be used to imply that Tertullian also did. I trust you can see the logic in that.)

Let's consider the suggestion that Eusebius drew from that translation the understanding that Tertullian was referring to a separate persecution of Christians other than Peter and Paul. If so, we can conclude that he knew nothing about it on his own, by some other established tradition, because he does not give us any information about it. He launches into the record of Peter and Paul's death at Nero's hands, and the witnesses to those deaths in the form of certain cemeteries and monuments, as well as a letter of Bishop Dionysius of Corinth which itself makes no mention of any other martyrdoms besides Peter and Paul. Now, why could we not expect some kind of parallel record, with supportive evidence, of this separate/other persecution of Christians in general, if he had such a thing in mind?

Furthermore, let's look at the sequence of ideas in this whole passage (ch.25), before and after the 'quote' from Tertullian. He first speaks of Nero's power-mad depravity: "he gave himself up to unholy practices and took up arms against the God of the universe." He speaks of "his perverse and extraordinary madness, which led him to the senseless destruction of innumerable lives, and drove him in the end to such a lust for blood that he did not spare even his nearest and dearest," and he goes on to speak of the various murdered members of Nero's family. So far, no inclusion of Christians. Then: "All this left one crime still to be added to his account - he was the first of the emperors to be the declared enemy of the worship of Almighty God." This together with the earlier "took up arms against the God of the universe," is all pretty woolly. If he meant a bloody slaughter of Christians in general, why not say so more directly? If he can regard such a general slaughter as a "crime", why would he ignore it completely but for these woolly phrases and focus solely on the execution of Peter and Paul?

I suggest that the reason is that he had no such view of things, no such traditions to draw on in order to provide specifics. The reason that he is woolly is because he is simply relying on this garbled translation of Tertullian and may not be quite sure just *what* it is supposed to refer to. In fact, he tells us that this is exactly what he is doing. After the remark about Nero being the first declared enemy of Almighty God, he says: "To this the Roman Tertullian refers in the following terms," implying that his "crime" assertion is dependent on Tertullian. We can reasonably wonder, too, since he focuses solely on Peter and Paul, whether he more or less regards the "crime" of being the enemy of Almighty God as encompassed simply

by those two martyrdoms—the **"tautē"** **notwithstanding**. If he can be woolly about what he has in mind for that crime, he can also be woolly about whether his apparent grammatical sequence between an A and a B is borne out in actuality. What he actually tells us provides no clear picture of that alleged sequence.

Thus, you are trying to draw too much, some 'technically necessary' meaning, from the line "Thus [ταυτη] having been announced [ανακηρυχθεις] as the first among the principal enemies of God, he was led on [επηρθη] to the slaughter of the apostles." Eusebius gives us no indication that the first clause refers to some general persecution of Christians that he knows of. The translation of the verb *epairō* seems to be intended to make it sound as though there is a sequence involved, but the verb simply means to "raise/rise up," here in the sense of being impelled to do something, namely to murder the apostles. There is no necessary, even normal, sense of going on to murder someone else after having murdered a bunch of other people previously.

What is the bottom line? That Eusebius gives us no identifiable indication that he envisions a separate, preceding persecution of Christians to that of Peter and Paul. Whatever he may have taken to be the implication of Tertullian's words—or rather of the faulty Greek translation of those words—he is unable to demonstrate (and unwilling to openly commit himself, apparently) that they refer to a general persecution of Christians involving death. If *he* can't demonstrate it, or even indicate to us that he in fact takes that meaning from Tertullian—we are on risky ground if we try to claim that *we* can do so. At the very best, his 'grammar' suggests that he may envision *something* that Nero was guilty of in regard to the Christians, but the other evidence I have provided (as in Melito, for example) points at most to some mild action against Christians. It is certainly curious that Eusebius cannot even bring himself to say that this is "death" but only something marking Nero as the "enemy of the worship of God," let alone actually bring himself to provide the slightest detail about any slaughter.

Keep in mind that my bottom line in all this is to discredit the Tacitus account of the slaughter of Christians after the great fire, by showing that we get no clear evidence from any Christian commentator before Sulpicius Severus that any of it was known in Christian tradition. Neither Tertullian, nor Eusebius, nor a smattering of others who might seem to 'hint' at something having happened under Nero, possibly distinct from the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, supports Tacitus.

And that includes the Acts of Paul, which you refuse to acknowledge. In fact, you have recourse to something amazingly fallacious on that topic.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
Again, how do you know that the author of the

Acts of Paul did not know of the general persecution and of the martyrdom of Paul, and simply connected them artificially? How do you know that he invented those other martyrs or persecuted Christians on his own accord, rather than finding them in texts or traditions and interpreting them as the result of a run-in with Paul?

This is no better than saying, How do we *know* that Paul didn't have an historical Jesus in mind even if he doesn't mention one? or, How do we *know* that there aren't any pink elephants living on the far side of the moon? We decide what we do or don't know by the evidence in front of us. And while it is always conceivable (if we are determined enough) that some species of pink elephants that don't need air to breathe could have evolved and were brought by aliens in spaceships to the far side of the moon and still live there, the evidence we have in front of us would argue against it. Similarly, the text of the Acts of Paul gives us no reason to believe that its author did what you are trying to suggest he might have done.

Earl Doherty



08-03-2008, 09:01 AM

#110

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
Location: Midwest
Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
First look at Tertullian, Apology 5:

Quote:

Tiberius, accordingly, in whose days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligence from Palestine of events which had clearly shown the truth of Christ's divinity, brought the matter before the senate, with his own decision in favor of Christ. The senate, because it had not given the approval itself, rejected his proposal. Caesar held to his opinion, threatening wrath against all accusers of the Christians. Consult your histories; you will there find that Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect, making progress then especially at Rome. But we glory in having our condemnation hallowed by the hostility of such a wretch. For any one who knows him, can understand that not except as being of singular excellence did anything bring on it Nero's condemnation.

There is nothing in the above passage of Tertullian

*that even hints at your 'two-stage solution'.
Nothing that specifies something which first took place, and then that something else took place.*

What is my two-stage solution? Are you referring to the next definition of *tunc*?

Quote:

What, then, is the "Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect"? That, as I explained, is revealed by two other passages in Tertullian.

....

"Tunc" (as you yourself pointed out) can mean "at that time". At what time? At the time that Nero stained with blood the rising faith.

Correct.

Quote:

While it can also mean 'next' or 'and then', if he had meant the latter, he could have used "postea".

Sure, he *could* have. So what? Few words are free of synonyms that *could* have been used.

Quote:

Since he gives not the slightest other detail of the "staining with blood,"

Tertullian does not give details because he tells the reader where to find the details. *Consult your records*. When I consult the records that a Latin reader in century II might have had access to, I find Suetonius; I find Tacitus. There may have been others.

Consult your records is practically a footnote, even if we are no longer sure exactly which records Tertullian had in mind. My point is, *that* is where the details would be. This is common practice both for ancient and for modern authors.

Quote:

Peter and Paul as constituting the staining with blood is the more natural alternative....

It leads to a tautology, and makes no sense; his words...:

Nero was the first to wield the sword against Christians. At that time he killed Peter and Paul.

...become nonsense:

Nero was the first to kill Peter and Paul. At that time, he killed Peter and Paul.

Tunc (at that time) is just not the right word for this usage.

Quote:

So far we have nothing to indicate that Tertullian possessed any concept of a wider persecution of Christians outside of apostles. Can I get you to agree on that at least?

Sorry, no. The wielding of the sword is, in Tertullian, a category to which the executions of Peter and Paul belong.

Quote:

If not, on what basis *in Tertullian* do you disagree?

The syntax.

Quote:

Now you seem to be trying to put all your chips on Eusebius.

No, Tertullian is just not quite as clear as Eusebius. You actually have to consult the Latin, for example, to be sure. With Eusebius, it is easier to see.

Quote:

I made the point that the line in Eusebius quoting Tertullian, "Study your records: there you will find that Nero was the first to persecute this teaching when, after subjugating the entire East, in Rome especially he treated everyone with savagery," is hardly to be equated with what Tertullian actually said. I suggested that the passage had been corrupted, perhaps interpolated, perhaps misconstrued in some way by the time it reached Eusebius.

You suggested that Eusebius was paraphrasing.

Quote:

On further research on this matter, I can accept that the variance between the two texts was almost certainly the result of an incompetent translator from Tertullian's Latin into Greek, the Greek which Eusebius is quoting.

This is what distresses me about these IIDB exchanges with you. I **already told you** that this is what scholars thought was going on: Eusebius was relying on a Greek translation of Tertullian. Roger Pearse, whose opinion you specifically asked for on this thread, even weighed in to

discuss an entire book (by Harnack) devoted to the question of this Greek translation of Tertullian. Yet you only now, through further research, come to this conclusion. I do not think you are reading my posts very carefully; I do not think you are giving them their fair due. I honestly think it would help a lot if you would do as others on this board do and *quote your opponent*, so as to answer what he or she actually wrote, and the better not to miss something important.

Quote:

From the garbled Greek translation, could Eusebius have interpreted it otherwise, that there was some kind of separate persecution of others besides the apostles? (Let me point out that if he did, that cannot be used to imply that Tertullian also did. I trust you can see the logic in that.)

Of course.

Quote:

Let's consider the suggestion that Eusebius drew from that translation the understanding that Tertullian was referring to a separate persecution of Christians other than Peter and Paul. If so, we can conclude that he knew nothing about it on his own, by some other established tradition, because he does not give us any information about it.

I basically agree.

Quote:

Furthermore, let's look at the sequence of ideas in this whole passage (ch.25), before and after the 'quote' from Tertullian. He first speaks of Nero's power-mad depravity: "he gave himself up to unholy practices and took up arms against the God of the universe." He speaks of "his perverse and extraordinary madness, which led him to the senseless destruction of innumerable lives, and drove him in the end to such a lust for blood that he did not spare even his nearest and dearest," and he goes on to speak of the various murdered members of Nero's family. So far, no inclusion of Christians.

Agreed.

Quote:

Then: "All this left one crime still to be added to his account - he was the first of the emperors to be the declared enemy of the worship of Almighty God." This together with the earlier "took up arms against the God of the universe," is all pretty woolly. If he meant a bloody slaughter of Christians in general, why not say so more

directly?

Because he is relying on Tertullian, who was similarly vague.

Quote:

If he can regard such a general slaughter as a "crime", why would he ignore it completely but for these woolly phrases and focus solely on the execution of Peter and Paul?

Because he has lots more information about Peter and Paul.

Quote:

I suggest that the reason is that he had no such view of things, no such traditions to draw on in order to provide specifics. The reason that he is woolly is because he is simply relying on this garbled translation of Tertullian and may not be quite sure just *what* it is supposed to refer to. In fact, he tells us that this is exactly what he is doing. After the remark about Nero being the first declared enemy of Almighty God, he says: "To this the Roman Tertullian refers in the following terms," implying that his "crime" assertion is dependent on Tertullian.

I agree that Eusebius is dependent upon Tertullian. I never said otherwise.

Quote:

We can reasonably wonder, too, since he focuses solely on Peter and Paul, whether he more or less regards the "crime" of being the enemy of Almighty God as encompassed simply by those two martyrdoms—**the "tautē" notwithstanding.**

The tautē is his own word here; it sinks your case with respect to Eusebius.

Quote:

If he can be woolly about what he has in mind for that crime, he can also be woolly about whether his apparent grammatical sequence between an A and a B is borne out in actuality. What he actually tells us provides no clear picture of that alleged sequence.

Thus, you are trying to draw too much, some 'technically necessary' meaning, from the line "Thus [ταυτη] having been announced [ανακηρυχθεις] as the first among the principal enemies of God, he was led on [ενηρθη] to the slaughter of the apostles." Eusebius gives us no

indication that the first clause refers to some general persecution of Christians that he knows of.

What Eusebius indicates is that Nero had already established himself as an enemy of God (one of the worst!) by the time he took out Peter and Paul. And, even in the botched Greek translation, two ideas come out clearly:

1. Nero persecuted this doctrine.
2. Nero exercised his cruelty against all at Rome.

Since Eusebius is keen to connect what Tertullian said to Nero being enemy number 1, he virtually has to have Christians in mind when he reads about Nero being cruel against all at Rome.

Quote:

What is the bottom line? That Eusebius gives us no identifiable indication that he envisions a separate, preceding persecution of Christians to that of Peter and Paul.

What do *you* think Eusebius had in mind when he wrote that Nero was already enemy number 1 by the time he got to Paul and Peter? Your mild action does not seem to cut it. How does one become one of the principal enemies of God through mild action?

Quote:

And that includes the Acts of Paul, which you refuse to acknowledge. In fact, you have recourse to something amazingly fallacious on that topic.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
Again, how do you know that the author of the Acts of Paul did not know of the general persecution and of the martyrdom of Paul, and simply connected them artificially? How do you know that he invented those other martyrs or persecuted Christians on his own accord, rather than finding them in texts or traditions and interpreting them as the result of a run-in with Paul?

This is no better than saying, How do we *know* that Paul didn't have an historical Jesus in mind even if he doesn't mention one? or, How do we *know* that there aren't any pink elephants living on the far side of the moon?

The first analogy is unfit, since it is an issue at point between us. The second is incompetent. We *know* that there are other Christians persecuted in the Acts of Paul;

that is not in dispute. What is at issue is how the author knew about them. This is like actually *finding* pink elephants on the moon; now the question is: How did they get there? Make it less dramatic. This is like finding a seashell on a mountain trail; how did it get there? It is possible that somebody was eating oysters at a campout. It is also possible the ocean once covered that mountain. Either way, you have to mount an argument.

That said, I can really tell you took more trouble with this post than with others I have recently criticized. You even looked up Latin synonyms for *tunc*.

Ben.



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Is the Forgery of Tacitus' Annals in the Renaissance an Untenable Position?

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Greetings neilgodfrey,

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08-03-2008, 06:00 PM

#111

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
Location: Ontario, Canada
Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
It leads to a tautology, and makes no sense; his words...:

Nero was the first to wield the sword against Christians. At that time he killed Peter and Paul.

...become nonsense:

Nero was the first to kill Peter and Paul. At that time, he killed Peter and Paul.

Well, now I see why we can't have a rational discussion. Not only do we live in different universes, we have a completely different understanding of the English

language.

There is no tautology, let alone nonsense, in your first line, since the second phrase in it serves to clarify what the first one refers to.

In the second, there is no clarification, both are stating the same thing at the same level and thus it is a tautology.

How about:

In 1942, the Allies went on an air raid over Hamburg. At that time, they bombed an armaments factory.

There is no nonsense, no tautology. They are both talking about the same event. The second part clarifies the particulars. And if all a number of witnesses or accounts of that bombing raid speak only of bombing that particular armaments factory, then we cannot assume that they bombed anything else.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
This is what distresses me about these IIDB exchanges with you. I already told you that this is what scholars thought was going on: Eusebius was relying on a Greek translation of Tertullian.

Oh, you told me. So whatever you tell me that scholars "think is going on" I'm expected to immediately accept that? Scholars think a lot of things, a lot of them nonsense. I'll check matters out for myself, if you don't mind. If I happen to come to the same conclusion, fine.

Quote:

The tautē is his own word here; it sinks your case with respect to Eusebius.

I know that tautē is Eusebius' word, even though you ran the quote and the following line by him together. I guess your assumption of my incompetence was what led you to miss how I showed that it does not sink my case.

Quote:

The first analogy is unfit, since it is an issue at point between us. The second is incompetent. We know that there are other Christians persecuted in the Acts of Paul; that is not in dispute. What is at issue is how the author knew about them. This is like actually finding pink elephants on the moon; now the question is: How did they get there? Make it less dramatic. This is like finding a seashell on a mountain trail; how did it get there? It is possible that somebody was eating oysters at a campout. It is also possible the ocean once covered that mountain. Either way, you have to mount an argument.

Your problem, Ben, is that you try to think things through too technically. And you get yourself all tied up in those technicalities. You don't ask yourself how a given Christian writer was liable to think, how he might be capable of making statements which could have some misleading grammatical elements to it, whether he is capable of introducing things on his own initiative. Christian writers are full of such stuff. How did the author of the Acts of Paul end up having other Christians martyred along with Paul? I don't need to present the complicated argument that you seem to require. The answer is: **He made it up!** Just like he made up all the stuff in the exchange between Nero and Paul. Do you think he got **that** from any 'source'? Do you think in that exchange he was adapting something he found in some historian? Where did Christians get the legends of the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul in Rome—especially in view of the fact that most thinking scholars today reject that Peter was ever there. The answer is: **They made it up!** Where did they get all that nonsensical junk in all the apocryphal Acts of this and that apostle? The answer is: **They made it up!** Where did they get the details of the reports in the Acts of Pilate? **They made them up!** Where did they get the material for the letters between Paul and Seneca? **They made it up!** Where did Eusebius get his letters between Jesus and Abgar? **He made them up, or else got from someone else who made them up!**

And if you don't think so, then you are far more naïve than I gave you credit for. It would be fool's errand to try to "mount an argument" as to what source they derived these things from, and I don't go on fool's errands.

And save us all the sneering innuendo about my linguistic abilities. "Postea" I didn't have to look up. And if there were a new Heaven's Gate sect that believed there were pink elephants on the far side of the moon (after all, didn't Amaleq point to them as believing in gods or whatever on the other side of the comet as an example of gullibility?), they might come up to you and say "How do we *know* there are no pink elephants living on the far side of the moon." Not only is the analogy competent enough, I don't see any difference between it and the Christian claim that there are Gods, heavenly beings and saints living on some spiritual heavenly body somewhere. You recently said that you believe in God even in the admitted absence of evidence. So the question is apt in *your* mouth: "How do we *know* God doesn't exist, even though there is no evidence?" I see no difference between that and "How do we *know* there aren't pink elephants on the far side of the moon?" Both are as nonsensical in the absence of evidence.

My analogy has proven *more* than apt.

Earl Doherty



Amaleq13

Veteran Member

Join Date: Nov 2003
 Location: Eagle River, Alaska
 Posts: 7,816



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**

Not only do we live in different universes, we have a completely different understanding of the English language.

That's a rather ironic comment since you appear to have completely *misunderstood* the plain English of Ben's post.



Quote:

There is no tautology, let alone nonsense, in your first line, since the second phrase in it serves to clarify what the first one refers to.

It is clear (or should be) that the first line isn't supposed to be a tautology, Earl. This line represents Ben's position. Ben is arguing that it *becomes* a tautology when *your* position is applied to it.

Quote:

In the second, there is no clarification, both are stating the same thing at the same level and thus it is a tautology.

Yes, this is the *only* line that is a tautology and the *only* line that was supposed to be one. This line represents *your* position as Ben sees it.

Is he wrong in saying that you are claiming that the "Christians" in the first line refers only to Peter and Paul? That is certainly the impression I've obtained from reading your posts.



08-04-2008, 03:27 PM

#113

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
 Location: Ontario, Canada
 Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Amaleq**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
It leads to a tautology, and makes no sense; his words...:

Nero was the first to wield the sword against Christians. At that time he killed Peter and Paul.

...become nonsense:

Nero was the first to kill Peter and Paul. At that time, he killed Peter and Paul.

That's a rather ironic comment since you appear to have completely misunderstood the plain English of Ben's post.

Quote:

There is no tautology, let alone nonsense, in your first line, since the second phrase in it serves to clarify what the first one refers to.

It is clear (or should be) that the first line isn't supposed to be a tautology, Earl. This line represents Ben's position. Ben is arguing that it becomes a tautology when your position is applied to it.

What? Are you serving as Ben's intermediary? Why doesn't he speak for himself, or does he now consider himself above that? Well, if you're speaking for him, neither one of you has thought it through. You particularly are always a bit too quick off the mark, shooting from the hip (complete with your usual smart-ass smilie), without giving things enough in-depth consideration. Perhaps that is because you always seem to work at a superficial level of argument ("People are gullible").

First of all, the first line cannot represent Ben's position, because it is neutral. If it can be taken either way then Ben cannot consider it a statement of his position. If he does, he has poorly presented it. In fact, the more natural way to take it is: "Nero was the first to wield the sword against Christians. That consisted of the killing of Peter and Paul." It cannot be automatically taken the way Ben wants it: "Nero was the first to wield the sword against Christians. After that first wielding of the sword, he killed Peter and Paul in a separate action." All that would have to be read into it.

Instead, he seems to be using that neutral/ambiguous statement to imply that, as I am reading it, it actually means what the second line states. Instead, I am reading it as I described using my 'bombing raid' analogy, that the second phrase in it serves to clarify what the first phrase refers to. He is the one claiming that, as I read it, it is a tautology. Well, it is not a tautology, and cannot be one, because it moves from a *general* statement to the clarification of what the general statement means *in particular*. He has made a clear mistake in linguistic analysis by saying that the second line, containing two identical particulars can be in any way equivalent to the first line, which contains a general element and a particular element. *That* is his failure to understand the English language properly, which is the point I made and which you have jumped on without thinking through.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Amaleq**
Is he wrong in saying that you are claiming that

the "Christians" in the first line refers only to Peter and Paul? That is certainly the impression I've obtained from reading your posts.

Of course he's not wrong. That's not the point, and it shows that you don't understand what is going on here. Just because I *understand* the two parts of the first sentence to be referring to the same thing does not mean that I have created a tautology. The tautology exists only in the *wording* of the second line. It does not exist in the wording of the first line, nor in the idea that I read in it. Surely you can grasp the principle involved. Was my analogy a tautology?

Quote:

In 1942, the Allies went on an air raid over Hamburg. At that time, they bombed an armaments factory.

Even though I intend the first phrase and the second phrase to refer to the same event, the statement as it stands is not a tautology. It only becomes one if I change the wording to say the same thing in both phrases: "In 1942, the Allies went to Hamburg and bombed an armaments factory. At that time they bombed an armaments factory."

Ben is claiming that the wording of the first line *is* a tautology, *given the meaning that I want to give it*. But that meaning is not legitimately represented by the second line, because it is phrased in a way which no one would ever do. It is the *wording*, and *only* the wording, that creates the tautology. He is using an illegitimate wording of an idea to try to discredit a legitimate reading of that idea in the very different first line. That is not a rational or acceptable way to employ the English language. And that was my point. But perhaps it was a little too complex and subtle for you.

I also find it disconcerting that someone accorded the post of moderator on the IIDB would demonstrate such animosity and knee-jerk opposition to a longstanding and legitimately argued atheist-leaning scholarly position. Perhaps you would be better employed on a Christian discussion board.

Earl Doherty



08-04-2008, 04:55 PM

#114


Amaleq13

Veteran Member

Join Date: Nov 2003
Location: Eagle River, Alaska
Posts: 7,816



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
First of all, the first line cannot represent Ben's position, because it is neutral.

A plain reading of the two sentences *is* his position. First, a reference to "Christians". Second, a reference to Peter and Paul as specific examples of the aforementioned Christians.

You do realize, I hope, that this red herring and does nothing to rescue your misinterpretation from irony.

Quote:

If it can be taken either way then Ben cannot consider it a statement of his position.

We've seen that it makes no sense to take it your way since it results in redundancy. Or are you arguing the author was a stylistically flawed writer?

Quote:

In fact, the more natural way to take it is: "Nero was the first to wield the sword against Christians. That consisted of the killing of Peter and Paul."

Shouldn't there be a "solely" before "consisted" to better represent your position? Regardless, this rewording doesn't appear to eliminate the tautology your reading creates.

Quote:

Instead, he seems to be using that neutral/ambiguous statement to imply that, as I am reading it, it actually means what the second line states.

Yes and he appears to be correct since, IIUC, you contend that "Christians" refers only to Peter and Paul.

Quote:

Instead, I am reading it as I described using my 'bombing raid' analogy,...

Your attempted analogy doesn't seem very analogous to me.

It should read more like this:

In 1942, the Allies went on an air raid over Hamburg and destroyed buildings. At that time, they bombed an armaments factory and an airport.

The phrase "destroyed buildings" is more analogous to the similarly plural "Christians".

Unfortunately for your position, it also reads very plainly as a transition from general "buildings" to specific examples just as Ben suggests we read the original sentences. It is certainly not obvious nor actually terribly reasonable to think that the author of the analogy intended

the reader to understand that *only* the two specifically named were destroyed.

Quote:

He has made a clear mistake in linguistic analysis by saying that the second line, containing two identical particulars can be in any way equivalent to the first line, which contains a general element and a particular element.

It is *your* claim that the "Christians" refers **only** to Peter and Paul, isn't it? That would make the mistake **yours**, wouldn't it?

My position as moderator is wholly irrelevant to my posts as a member and my only animosity is against poor arguments. Stop making them and we'll both be happy.

Isn't strange that I get accused of being a Christian almost every time I argue against a mythicist?



08-04-2008, 05:20 PM

#115

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
Location: Ontario, Canada
Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Amaleq**
A plain reading of the two sentences is his position.

It is not a plain reading, and I have demonstrated that.

Quote:

We've seen that it makes no sense to take it your way since it results in redundancy.

You have seen it that way, and I've demonstrated that you are wrong.

You know, Doug, discussion and debate proceeds not by simply restating your position after a counter-argument has been made. It proceeds by you tackling those counter-arguments and demonstrating how they are invalid and that your previous position is confirmed. You haven't done that. It may come as news to you, but that's how it's done.

Quote:

Your attempted analogy doesn't seem very analogous to me.

It should read more like this:
In 1942, the Allies went on an air raid over Hamburg and destroyed buildings. At that time, they bombed an armaments factory and an

airport.

No, Doug, you are trying to turn my analogy into something that automatically supports Ben, and does *not* conform to Ben's line: "Nero was the first to wield the sword against Christians." By you sticking in "and destroyed buildings" you are adding something specific, as though Ben said, "Nero was the first to wield the sword against a bunch of Christian arsonists," which automatically must mean more than Peter and Paul, and would link them to the fire. That is not what Ben's line says, and it cannot be made to say that. You are trying to get me to beg your question.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Amaleq**
*It is **your** claim that the "Christians" refers **only** to Peter and Paul, isn't it? That would make the mistake **yours**, wouldn't it?*

Yes, it is my claim, or at least that we cannot demonstrate that it is *more* than Peter and Paul, plus perhaps a few others which the legends of Peter and Paul have roped in with them, such as in the Acts of Paul (although even that is not in evidence in either Tertullian or Eusebius). All of this, to discredit any claim that references in Christian commentators before Sulpicius Severus support the picture in Tacitus' Annals 15:44. (That is not any 'changing of the goalposts.' It has always been that.)

And you calling it a "mistake" is more begging the question. That is what we are trying to establish here.

Quote:

My position as moderator is wholly irrelevant to my posts as a member and my only animosity is against poor arguments. Stop making them and we'll both be happy.

I'm the one making poor arguments? I can see that this is all over your head, Doug. I think I'll just leave you to bustle around by yourself. I`m not wasting any more time.

And I did not accuse you of being a Christian. I said that it was ironic that (even given your secular status) you showed such animosity to the Jesus myth position. And I simply wondered if that was appropriate to a moderator on the IIDB.

Earl Doherty



08-04-2008, 05:59 PM

#116

Simonmagus

Junior Member



Quote:

Join Date: Jul 2008
 Location: Calgary Alberta
 Canada
 Posts: 5

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**
And I did not accuse you of being a Christian. I said that it was ironic that (even given your secular status) you showed such animosity to the Jesus myth position. And I simply wondered if that was appropriate to a moderator on the IIDB.

Earl Doherty

Please explain how it would be any less appropriate than moderators showing such animosity to the *historical* Jesus position? I have noticed *that* on this forum also, so what is wrong with a moderator vigorously opposing the Jesus myth position here also?

What's good for the goose ...



08-04-2008, 06:08 PM

#117


Amaleq13

Veteran Member

Join Date: Nov 2003
 Location: Eagle River, Alaska
 Posts: 7,816



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
It is not a plain reading, and I have demonstrated that.

You *tried* but your effort requires one to assume the author presented a tautology. That doesn't appear to be plausible.

Quote:

No, Doug, you are trying to turn my analogy into something that automatically supports Ben, and does *not* conform to Ben's line: "Nero was the first to wield the sword against Christians." By you sticking in "and destroyed buildings" you are adding something specific, as though Ben said, "Nero was the first to wield the sword against a bunch of Christian arsonists," which automatically must mean more than Peter and Paul, and would link them to the fire.

No, "buildings" is far from being that specific. It is wholly analogous to the similarly plural and generic "Christians". Your reference to "Hamburg" was neither a generic plural nor specific enough to be analogous.

Quote:

I'm the one making poor arguments? I can see that this is all over your head, Doug. I think I'll just leave you to bustle around by yourself. I`m not wasting any more time.

Yes, and this argument *ad hominem* is only the most recent example.

Quote:

And I did not accuse you of being a Christian.

Suggesting that I might be more appropriately placed as a moderator on a Christian site doesn't imply it? 🙄

Quote:

I said that it was ironic that (even given your secular status) you showed such animosity to the Jesus myth position.

I have no animosity to the Jesus myth position, Earl. I consider it a viable possibility. Poor arguments, as I already said, are another question.

Quote:

And I simply wondered if that was appropriate to a moderator on the IIDB.

There is no vow to uphold and protect the Jesus myth position involved in holding the position of moderator but, as I already mentioned, that position is entirely irrelevant to my posts here as a member. Throw this nonsense in as another example of poor argumentation.



08-04-2008, 11:59 PM

#118

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
Location: Midwest
Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** [▶](#)
*How about:
In 1942, the Allies went on an air raid over Hamburg. At that time, they bombed an armaments factory.*

If the only thing the air raid targeted and accomplished was the armaments factory itself, then I think this statement is misleading, since it appears on its surface that the bombing of the armaments factory was part of the air raid, not the whole of it. *Y happened at the same time as X* is just not a very good way of saying that *X is fully constituted by Y*.

Quote:

Oh, you told me. So whatever you tell me that scholars "think is going on" I'm expected to immediately accept that?

No! Absolutely not. But I do expect you to interact with my statement, rather than keep writing your posts as if I never made it.

Quote:

Scholars think a lot of things, a lot of them nonsense. I'll check matters out for myself, if you don't mind.

I am all in favor of you checking things out. So, when I first wrote to you that scholars think Eusebius was using a faulty Greek translation of the Latin, did you check things out? Or did you just ignore that part of my post for the next several pages of thread?

Quote:

Your problem, Ben, is that you try to think things through too technically. And you get yourself all tied up in those technicalities. You don't ask yourself how a given Christian writer was liable to think, how he might be capable of making statements which could have some misleading grammatical elements to it, whether he is capable of introducing things on his own initiative. Christian writers are full of such stuff. How did the author of the Acts of Paul end up having other Christians martyred along with Paul? I don't need to present the complicated argument that you seem to require. The answer is: **He made it up!** Just like he made up all the stuff in the exchange between Nero and Paul. Do you think he got **that** from any 'source'?

I doubt it. And do you know *why* I doubt he was using a source for the exchange between Paul and Nero? Because I cannot find that exchange anywhere else before or independently of the Acts of Paul. If a document were to be discovered that actually contained that exchange and was independent of this text, I would cheerfully change my mind.

Apply that to the persecution of other Christians in this text. Can you find a source or two that has other Christians dying under Nero? If so, then this datum is not in the same category as the exchange between Nero and Paul, is it? Or does multiple independent attestation mean *nothing* to you?

Quote:

Where did Christians get the legends of the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul in Rome—especially in view of the fact that most thinking scholars today reject that Peter was ever there.

Do most thinking scholars reject this? (And what do you classify as a thinking scholar?) I know some do; I also know some do not.

Quote:

And save us all the sneering innuendo about my linguistic abilities.

No sneer was intended. Perhaps we all need a break.

Quote:

And if there were a new Heaven's Gate sect that believed there were pink elephants on the far side of the moon (after all, didn't Amaleq point to them as believing in gods or whatever on the other side of the comet as an example of gullibility?), they might come up to you and say "How do we *know* there are no pink elephants living on the far side of the moon."

My answer is that I do not know for certain, but I have no reason (yet) to think there are.

Quote:

Not only is the analogy competent enough....

The question in the analogy was *do they exist?* The question in the Acts of Paul is *where did they come from?*

How can this be a tight analogy? Could you think of no better? I even gave you a better one. What was wrong with *it*?

Quote:

You recently said that you believe in God even in the admitted absence of evidence. So the question is apt in *your* mouth: "How do we *know* God doesn't exist, even though there is no evidence?"

We do not; the difference is that I do not *claim* to have objective evidence for the existence of God. Surely you appreciate that difference.

Ben.



08-05-2008, 12:01 AM

#119


Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
Location: Midwest
Posts: 4,787



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
It cannot be automatically taken the way Ben wants it: "Nero was the first to wield the sword against Christians. After that first wielding of the sword, he killed Peter and Paul in a separate action." All that would have to be read into it.

That is not how I want it; that is one way of taking *tunc*,

but it is the other way of taking *tunc* that I have been talking about most.

Ben.



08-05-2008, 12:10 AM

#120

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
Location: Midwest
Posts: 4,787



BTW, Earl, still no comments on Revelation and the *Ascension of Isaiah*?

After it is consummated, Beliar the great ruler, the king of this world, will descend, he who has ruled it since it came into being; yea, he will descend from his firmament in the likeness of a man, a lawless king, the slayer of his mother; he himself will persecute the plant which the twelve apostles of the beloved have planted. Of the twelve one will be delivered into his hands.

Ben.



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08-21-2008, 03:18 AM

#121

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005
Location: Ontario, Canada
Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
BTW, Earl, still no comments on Revelation and the Ascension of Isaiah?

I hate to leave loose ends, and I did promise myself that once I was finished my book section on the non-Christian witness to Jesus, which included addressing a couple of further points such as the above documents in regard to Tacitus, I'd get back and not leave Ben hanging. So here are a couple of sections from my finished draft. Ben will find that I've also come across another document we had both overlooked, the Acts of Peter, which offers a slam dunk indication that no general Neronian persecution was envisioned by early Christians—those little "hints" Ben tried to lay so much emphasis on notwithstanding.

Quote:

The Acts of Paul and Peter

It has been suggested that the Acts of Paul (an apocryphal work written before the end of the 2nd century) contains an allusion to the Neronian persecution as a result of the great fire. Section 11 tells the tale of the martyrdom of Paul. After a dramatic miracle in which Paul raises a dead boy, Nero finds that many of those surrounding him are Christians, which leads him to seek out other Christians in the city; he has them all imprisoned along with Paul. Paul boldly tells the emperor that one day Christ will destroy the world with fire. An enraged Nero decrees that all the prisoners will themselves be executed by fire, though Paul will die by beheading. There is no mention of the Great Fire itself, or of Christians punished for setting it. The whole proceedings have grown out of the legend of Paul's own martyrdom. Actually, by the author of the Acts of Paul describing this 'round-up' of other Christians as proceeding out of Nero's contact with Paul, he is showing his ignorance of the round-up of Christians as a result of the fire and Nero's attempt to put the blame on them. We have no indication that this enlargement on the legend about Paul has been inspired by knowledge of a persecution by Nero such as Tacitus describes. In any case, the latter scene would hardly have been so gutted in scope and intensity, with its historical essence eliminated; it is much more likely to have worked in the other direction, that enlargements on the legend of Paul's martyrdom such as we find in the Acts of Paul eventually led, with the help of other factors, to imagining the much more extravagant scene we now find in Tacitus.

We happen to have a rare attestation to the author of this apocryphal work. Tertullian tells us in *De baptismo* 17 that "the presbyter in Asia who produced this document...was removed from his office after he had been convicted and had confessed that he did it out of love for Paul." This reveals that such forgeries were done by individuals surreptitiously, seeking to foist false documents on their communities.

Around the same time, probably in the 180s, another forger was busy with the Acts of Peter.⁵ In the chapter on Peter's martyrdom (9), the writer speaks of the "mass of people" who were daily converted to Christ by the Apostle—and of women to renouncing the marriage bed, falling "in love with the doctrine of purity," much to the distress of their husbands who saw to Peter's arrest and crucifixion upside down. Nero, angry at being denied the opportunity to punish Peter personally, was about to attack those Christian

converts, "for he sought to destroy all those brethren who had been made disciples by Peter" (41/12). He was prevented from doing so by a dream in which he was being scourged and told: "Nero, you cannot now persecute or destroy the servants of Christ. Keep your hands from them!" The writer tells us: "And so Nero, being greatly alarmed because of this vision, kept away from the disciples [the converts in Rome] from the time that Peter departed this life. And thereafter the brethren kept together with one accord, rejoicing and exulting in the Lord."

No writer who knew of a general persecution and killing of Christian brethren in the city of Rome by Nero could possibly have constructed this scene which effectively ruled out the occurrence of any such persecution. After the martyrdom of Peter, he is saying, the brethren in Rome were safe from Nero's depredations. Thus we have what amounts to a denial of the Tacitean event—even though the writer would have been unaware of any such event having been envisioned. (We can presume he was a different writer from that of the Acts of Paul, who did create a scene of Neronian persecution of Christians, this time as an adjunct to the martyrdom of Paul, involving a limited number of victims and no connection to the fire. Since the latter has thus contradicted the Tacitean scenario, we have both of these apocrypha supplying evidence that no such tradition was known in the Christian circles of the later 2nd century.)

Revelation and the Sibylline Oracles

There is a scene in Revelation which is often pointed to as containing a reference to the Christians martyred by Nero. Before examining that passage, one should note that this document, the apocalypse of apocalypses, employs a range of elements characteristic of the genre, often in obscure and chaotic fashion. Vivid hyperbole and overwrought sensationalism run riot. Identifying the meaning and symbolic nature of the various End-time figures and scenarios has challenged scholars for generations. Contradictions and conundrums abound, simply because the author was not concerned with bringing logic or consistency to his picture (and because scholars insist on introducing the Gospel Jesus into the mix: see page xxx).

For example, in chapter 14, the famous "144,000" are presented as those "who alone from the whole world had been ransomed." (A certain Christian sect today still regards this figure as the total of those from all humanity who are destined to be saved.) In chapter 7, on the other hand, they are first introduced as those who receive the seal of God, as his servants; yet immediately following this another group is presented who are also saved

'by the blood of the Lamb.' It is this group we must examine (7:9-14):

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb....These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

To identify this group as representing the Christians martyred by Nero after the fire ignores the first verse quoted. The Roman Christian community was hardly made up of people from every nation, tribe and language. That very world-wide inclusiveness and vast numbers involved indicate that the writer is speaking not only of martyrs of the past but of the future. As David E. Aune (Harper's Bible Commentary, p.1310) puts it: "(In 7:9-17) John receives a visionary preview of an innumerable host representing all of the people of God." These are other Christians, over and above the 144,000, who "will perish in the 'great tribulation' (v.14)..."

Thus we need no past 'great tribulation' to have inspired the author. By the time he wrote, persecution was, if not constant and widespread, a fact of life for many believers in the Christ. Even a focus on "Babylon" throughout the document is not to be limited to an association merely with the city of Rome. As John Sweet (Revelation, p.26) says: "'Babylon' is far more than simply Rome." The "great city" represented the earthly power with all its corruption and cruelty. Sweet regards the visions of the martyrs standing before the throne of the Lamb as all of God's people who had suffered, "whether under Pharaoh, Jezebel or Antiochus, or in the guise of Sodom, Ninevah, Babylon, Jerusalem or finally Rome." Such a concept fits the language and scope of chapter 7's scene. And in 17:5-6, the vision of the woman riding the beast represents "Babylon the great" and "the great city," and it is she, representing the powers of the world, who is "drunk with the blood of God's people and with the blood of those who had borne their testimony to Jesus." This goes far beyond any association with a Neronian pogrom.⁶

A particularly bloody image is created in 14:19-20, in which an angel is directed to gather in the earth's grape harvest and throw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. "The winepress was trodden outside the city, and for two hundred miles around blood flowed from the press to the height of the horses' bridles." John A. T. Robinson (Redating the New Testament, p.230f) interprets

this as echoing Nero's slaughter of Christians, suggesting that without an historical provocation like that, the "vindictive reaction" of John's Apocalypse "is scarcely credible." But Revelation is chockfull of other equally horrific scenes of blood and destruction to be wreaked upon the earth, and few if any of those suffer attempts to be identified with specific historical events. The apocalyptic fever of the times itself, especially in the decades following the Jewish War, would have been sufficient to provoke John's "vindictive reaction." To that we might also add John's own personality, a mind bordering on the psychotic; there are many preachers today who consign non-believers to similar horrors without having experienced anything on the scale of the alleged Neronian persecution.

But if John did require some immediate inspiration for his vision of persecution, he could have found one in Domitian. Irenaeus (Adv. Haer. V, 30) placed Revelation "toward the end of Domitian's reign" and most modern scholars have followed suit, opting for the year 95 or 96. While those scholars also tend to play down the extent of Domitian's persecution of Christians, Pliny only a decade and a half later witnesses to its operation under Trajan's rule, pointing to the possibility of earlier versions providing an impulse to John in the 90s.

An alternative dating has been suggested for the late 60s, following the death of Nero in 68. Two passages in Revelation, in chapters 13 and 17, suggest the so-called *Nero redivivus* legend, in which Nero—either returning from the dead or not having died in the first place—would return at the head of an army to reconquer his kingdom; in that role he was also associated with the Antichrist. But such a legend would hardly have developed within a year of Nero's death, to immediately inspire a writer in Asia Minor; nor does the Christian Antichrist legend seem to have arisen that early. In fact, if Nero and a great slaughter of Christians *had* figured in John's past and provided the inspiration that some would like to read into passages of Revelation, we might expect him to assume a greater role than he does. The two passages which offer a *Nero redivivus* do not assign to him a past atrocity, and in fact he is more or less subsumed into the Antichrist figure who shall arrive in the future. This is the "beast" of chapter 13, who will make war on the saints and be worshiped for a time by the world. These expectations are those of apocalyptic tradition and do not require that Nero himself, in being identified with the beast, was known for some great barbarity against a mass of Christians.

We can consequently dismiss Revelation as providing any sign of Christian knowledge about an

episode of persecution on the scale of Annals 15:44.

While we are on the subject, the *Nero redivivus* legend figures prominently in some of the Jewish/Christian Sibylline Oracles, referred to above. Such oracles, in poetic form, were a feature of several societies in the Graeco-Roman world, including Egyptian Judaism, extending from Hellenistic times well into the Christian era. As in apocalyptic writing, they were represented as the product of a past prophetess who successfully 'predicted' the future, but they included much genuine prophecy as well. Christianity took over many of the Sibylline Oracles of the Jews and reworked them; the Oracles were known and used by many of the Church Fathers.

Several passages predicting the return of Nero can be found. And while it is difficult to say which might have come under special scrutiny by Christians, it is a fact that no opportunity was taken to amend any of the original Jewish passages on Nero to reflect a dramatic persecution by that emperor of an entire Christian community. One in particular, in Book 5, verses 140-146, stands out:

Him, they say, Zeus himself begot and
lady Hera.
Playing at theatricals with honey-sweet
songs rendered
With melodious voice, he will destroy
many men, and his wretched mother.
He will flee from Babylon [Rome], a
terrible and shameless prince
Whom all mortals and noble men
despise.
For he destroyed many men and laid
hands on the womb.
He sinned against spouses, and was
sprung from abominable people....

The destruction of "many men," especially mentioned in close association with his mother, would quite reasonably refer to the friends and family which Nero had murdered. Yet if passages like this fell under Christian eyes, and they were in the habit of interpolating references to reflect their own interests, it is significant that no doctoring was undertaken to add to Nero's list of atrocities what should have been the greatest of them all, the slaughter of Rome's Christians as arsonists of the great fire as described by Tacitus.

The Ascension of Isaiah

Finally, we can look at yet another transformation of Nero, this time in the Ascension of Isaiah. The passage from 3:13 to 4:22 has been identified as a Christian insertion into an earlier Jewish work (the

first five chapters) now referred to as "the Martyrdom of Isaiah." This section Michael Knibb (*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol.2, p.149), on the basis of its *Nero redivivus* feature, dates to the end of the 1st century CE since "presumably a little time would have been needed for this belief to develop." In 4:2f, the descent into the world of the angel Beliar is prophesied, "the king of this world, which he has ruled ever since it existed." It is clear that Beliar is not simply Nero returned; he is a demonic figure expected at the End time who has existed since creation. Rather, he has assumed the *form* of a "king of iniquity"—Nero, "a murderer of his mother." The *Nero redivivus* legend has apparently become so strong by this time that it has imposed itself on the current more traditional apocalyptic thinking.

In describing this past king, he says:

"and (he) will persecute the plant which the twelve apostles of the Beloved will have planted; some of the twelve will be given into his hand."
 [Knibb notes that the Greek manuscript "is apparently more precise, '[one] of the twelve'—an allusion to the martyrdom of Peter or Paul." It would seem that at the end of the 1st century, the Christians possessed a tradition about the martyrdom in Rome of only one of those figures, possibly Paul.]

In this reference to persecuting "the plant" we are brought back once again to yet another example of a very frustratingly vague reference to a Neronian persecution of Christianity in general—if we can securely take it in such a manner. The wording is too brief and ambiguous to be sure of anything, and the textual tradition of this document has been long and tortuous. But if we assume that the passage was originally meant to impute to Nero something beyond the murder of a single apostle, we can add it to our list of the several other early Christian writings we have looked at which have created the same impression—and like them, regrettably lacking in any specifics which might enable us to decide whether to identify it with a mass persecution such as that outlined in Tacitus. Those Christian writers of the first few centuries would seem to have had an itch they couldn't help scratching, without being able to put their finger on what exactly had produced it.

How to interpret that "itch"? After the above, much further discussion follows, but this later quote will give you an idea of the sort of conclusions I have reached.

Quote:

Thus we have been led to a feasible explanation for the later genesis of the passage in Tacitus and the idea of the persecution by Nero for causing the great fire: the phenomenon of 'blaming the Christians.' Like the Testimonium, its embodiment does not emerge in Christians' own writings until the 4th century, in this case at its very end. As it stands, Annals 15:44 may be as much a Christian product as the extant Testimonium in Josephus is. But now we face a series of possibilities. As is claimed for the Testimonium, might this blame have built on something in Tacitus? Might Tacitus have referred to a situation on a mild level of 'persecution' or defamation which would fit with the impression conveyed by Melito of Sardis about Christian ill-treatment in the time of Nero: attacks on some Christian or Jewish community in Rome whose doctrines or apocalyptic expectations were held in contempt by the emperor and/or the people, remarks perhaps in close proximity to the account of the fire but not associated with it?

Whether that was the case or not, who might actually have tampered with the Tacitus passage? Might we theorize that the account of the fire was at some point first reworked by a pagan scribe to set it on the path of an association of Christians with it, given the pagan propensity just outlined to blame them for every misadventure that came along? Some time later, a Christian scribe might then have worked on it further. Or was the entire thing a Christian insertion into the Annals—*ex nihilo* as far as any literary precedent was concerned—giving expression to an 'in the air' pagan accusation that Christians had been responsible for the burning of the city at the time of Nero? Either one could have envisioned as part of the picture the Christians suffering some punishment for it. (The cryptic passage in Suetonius would have supported this.) A Christian redactor's motive might have been a desire to create yet another powerful piece of inspiring martyrology, this time from the pen of a pagan historian no less, and also, perhaps, to introduce a reference to Christ, who had an annoying habit of being missing in so many of those historians.

Prior to this pagan/Christian collaboration to develop the dramatic legend of a Neronian persecution, Christian commentators would have had no concrete basis—or a very mild one—on which to envision Nero's animosity, thus explaining why the references we have looked at which may possibly point in such a direction are so obscure, cursory and unspecific. Other influences on the Christian impulse to build up Nero as the great persecutor would have been Peter and Paul's association with that emperor and the legends of their martyrdom at Rome during his time. As well, Nero was seen as the Antichrist, due to arrive at the apocalyptic End-time, the future enemy of the

Messiah; thus, in a balance between future and past, it was natural for him to become the great enemy of Christianity at its beginning. Drews also suggests (op.cit., p.46) "the political interest of the Christians in representing themselves as Nero's victims, in order to win the favor and protection of his successors on that account."

Indeed, we could consider that, for those reasons just outlined, the gradual development of a Christian conception of Nero as the first great persecutor could have occurred without *any* particular event, minor or otherwise, being at the root of it, other than growing legends about the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul....

It should be noted that I do not advocate for Tacitus one particular scenario which I consider 'proven,' with all elements nailed down. There are too many different options available for that, but all of them discredit the passage as providing reliable witness to the HJ. I'll add one final quote, to give you my 'bottom line.'

Quote:

Tacitus' Bottom Line

We have thus arrived at the crux of the entire argument. If no evidence can be supplied that Christians until the time of Sulpicius Severus knew of a great persecution by Nero as arsonists of the Great Fire, and there are even telling pieces of evidence against it, what does this say for the scene in the Annals? The compelling conclusion is that, as it stands, it is historically erroneous, and very much so. Even if the evidence collected in Christian documents points to the possibility of some mild measure or antagonism on Nero's part to the Christian community in the Rome of his day, then in such a case, if we are to rescue authorship of 15:44 by Tacitus, we would have to acknowledge that the historian got it quite wrong. He would have created out of a minor event a vast exaggeration in scope and intensity, perhaps confusing something that took place around the time of the fire as something that was intimately involved with it, the very cause of the conflagration itself, leading to a bloodbath unparalleled in any domestic event the Romans ever recorded—and no Christians did for three centuries.

But is this really feasible? The Annals were written only five decades after the fact. Tacitus may not have been a 'careful historian' to the extent that is often made of him, but he did have available to him good and multiple sources. Much of the rest of his text shows him to be one of the most reliable historians of his age, with two feet on the ground. How could he have gotten a relatively simple

matter like this so wrong? If he could make such a mistake in regard to Nero and the Christians, we could expect his works to be riddled with other mistakes, and he would hardly have gained the reputation he has among both ancients and moderns. If *no* event took place under Nero, and Christians were simply imagining that Nero was the first persecutor—perhaps building on the legendary martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, or for reasons like those offered earlier, such as political interest or because *Nero redivivus* became associated with the Antichrist—then Tacitus has simply invented the whole thing, for reasons or through error which we can scarcely understand or identify. This seems even less feasible.

Either way, the reliability of 15:44 cannot be rescued. With the fundamental accuracy or authenticity of its central feature, the persecution of the Roman Christians for the fire, so undermined or discredited, there is no way to salvage its accompanying feature, the reference to "Christus" as executed by Pontius Pilate. And thus the secure lifeline which Tacitus is claimed to have thrown to those foundering in the sea of doubt and lack of evidence for the existence of an historical Jesus has been severed and washed away.

Earl Doherty



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