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Pliny's reference to Christ "Quasi Deo" - Christ as a god, or Christ as if a god?

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The FRDB Archive

Greetings neilgodfrey,

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06-24-2008, 06:17 AM

#1

[Roger Pearse](#)

Veteran Member

Join Date: Apr 2002

Location: N/A

Posts: 4,370

Pliny's reference to Christ "Quasi Deo" - Christ as a god, or Christ as if a god?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Solitary Man** [✉](#)

Quote:

Surprisingly Pliny is not told that the christians follow the christ crucified by Pilate he is simply their god.

Er, shades of Doherty and bad Latin. Pliny does not say that Christ is their god, but merely that they worship him as if he were a god.

7. Affirmabant autem hanc fuisse summam vel culpae suae vel erroris, quod **essent soliti** stato die ante lucem convenire, **carmenque Christo quasi deo dicere** secum

invicem seque sacramento non in scelus aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta ne latrocinia ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum appellati abnegarent.

...they were accustomed (essent soliti) to come together (convenire) before dawn (ante lucem) on a fixed day (stato die) and (que) to speak (dicere) a poem (carmen) to Christ (Christo) as if (quasi) to a god (deo)...

All the best,

Roger Pearse



06-24-2008, 06:35 AM

#2

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005

Location: Ontario, Canada

Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Solitary Man**

Quote:

Surprisingly Pliny is not told that the christians follow the christ crucified by Pilate he is simply their god.

Er, shades of Doherty and bad Latin. Pliny does not say that Christ is their god, but merely that they worship him as if he were a god.

I can see we're going to need a few extra pegs in lower positions on this board. It is absolutely amazing how so many anti-mythicists here come off so cocky and cocksure of themselves when they really know very little.

From my "Alleged Scholarly Refutations of the Jesus Myth" article:

Quote:

In most cases, Van Voorst provides an extensive analysis of the documents he examines, although this does not prevent him from making unfounded assumptions and self-serving choices. Often he will include an observation or interpretation which is actually detrimental to his case and then downplay or ignore it, preferring a more amenable conclusion. In regard to Pliny's letter to Trajan, he notes [p.28] that A. N. Sherwin-White "points out that in Pliny 'quasi is used commonly without the idea of supposal,' to mean simply 'as'." I've long made that observation myself, but Van Voorst is the first I've seen since Sherwin-White to admit that "Christo quasi deo" does not have to be translated "Christ as if (to) a god." Van Voorst goes on to note that "Pliny can also use quasi in its typically hypothetical meaning ('as if, as though'),"

but we have no means of knowing which way Pliny meant it. If the key phrase can be taken as "sang a hymn to Christ as (to) a god," then there is not even the implied suggestion of an historical man. Van Voorst himself concludes: "So while 'as if' may imply here that the Christ Christians worship was once a man, we should not place too much weight on this." Van Voorst concludes that Pliny got whatever his information might be on Christianity from Christians themselves in Bithynia.

(There was another scholar I saw recently who made the same remark about the Pliny translation, but I can't put my mental finger on him. If I can track it down, I'll let you know.)

And I'm rather disappointed that Roger seems to have supported S.M. in his narrow understanding, and did not point out that the "if" is not necessary in the Pliny passage.

Earl Doherty



06-24-2008, 06:53 AM

#3

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

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



What are (some of) the (other) references for the use of *quasi* in Pliny?

Thanks in advance.

Ben.



06-24-2008, 07:14 AM

#4

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben**
What are (some of) the (other) references for the use of quasi in Pliny?

Quite frankly, I don't know, Ben. I have not surveyed the complete Latin text of Pliny's letters. I made that particular point based on the views of other scholars, those "authoritative" ones that everyone seems to appeal to. I assume that Sherwin-White had a look.

Earl



06-24-2008, 07:34 AM

#5


Toto

Contributor

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith** 
What are (some of) the (other) references for the use of quasi in Pliny?

Thanks in advance.

Ben.

[a bit of Sherwin-White online](#)

Quote:

quasi deo. 'as to god'. In Pliny quasi is used commonly without the idea of supposal. Cf. Letters 32(=VIII.8).3, 38(=IX.23).3 n.

More discussion of this particular issue in [Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence](#) (or via: amazon.co.uk) p. 28 viewable on [Google books](#). Footnote 26 notes that PG Ware, Oxford Latin Dictionary, states that with the ellipsis of the verb quasi generally means "as if." Van Voorst does not place much reliance on this reference.



06-24-2008, 07:47 AM

#6

Ben C Smith

Veteran Member


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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Toto** 

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith** 
What are (some of) the (other) references for the use of quasi in Pliny?

Thanks in advance.

Ben.

[a bit of Sherwin-White online](#)

Quote:

quasi deo. 'as to god'. In Pliny quasi is used commonly without the idea of supposal. Cf. Letters 32(=VIII.8).3, 38(=IX.23).3 n.

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this reference.

Thanks, Toto.

And I have also drummed up [the Perseus list of the 144 instances in Pliny of the word *quasi*](#). Of course, that would be a lot of work to go through. I think I will take a glance at those references Sherwin-White gives before I do anything with that.

Ben.



06-24-2008, 08:50 AM

#7

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005

Location: Ontario, Canada

Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Quote:

Originally Posted by Toto [View Post](#)

Quote:

Originally Posted by Ben C Smith [View Post](#)

What are (some of) the (other) references for the use of quasi in Pliny?

Thanks in advance.

Ben.

a bit of Sherwin-White online

Quote:

quasi deo. 'as to god'. In Pliny quasi is used commonly without the idea of supposal. Cf. Letters 32(=VIII.8).3, 38(=IX.23).3 n.

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Thanks, Toto.

And I have also drummed up the Perseus list of the 144 instances in Pliny of the word quasi. Of course, that would be a lot of work to go through. I think I will take a glance at those references Sherwin-White gives before I do anything with that.

Ben.

And my thanks to both of you. It always helps when someone else does your work for you. Of course, that's what we're here for, (in Fathom's commendable words) "to learn"--from each other.

(As usual, Ben, Perseus is playing hard-to-get.)

Earl



06-24-2008, 09:31 AM

#8

jules?

Senior Member

Join Date: Oct 2007

Location: mind the time rift,
cardiff, wales

Posts: 645



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Solitary Man**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **jules?**
in the first instance any record of trial and execution would require a name for the victim. In Histories Tacitus refers to Simon who proclaimed himself 'king of the Jews' and hence the messiah or christus.

*How do you connect the two?**Who all were called Christus?**But we have that. Josephus and the Gospels report the same thing. The best hypothesis that satisfies all the evidence is that a real person named Jesus called Christ was crucified by Pilate.**Josephus never calls Vespasian the Christ. He merely said that he was whom the prophecies talked about.**Why is that relevant?*

Quote:

Surprisingly Pliny is not told that the christians follow the christ crucified by Pilate he is simply their god.

Er, shades of Doherty and bad Latin. Pliny does not say that Christ is their god, but merely that they worship him as if he were a god.

Messiah= Latin Christos= English Anointed. Kingship or High priests were annointed [are you keeping up SM?] Jesus gets the special translation of Joshua but no else does and it seems he got to monopolise Christ. So when Tacitus mention Christians he is really saying followers of the Anointed who get there name from the Anointed who according to official records or a later christian scribe was executed by Pilate. But Herod was Anointed, [Herod christ!] and Simon claimed he was [no doubt by a higher authority] and so did all the other imposters as mentioned by Josephus.

Quote:

But we have that. Josephus and the Gospels report the same thing. The best hypothesis that satisfies all the evidence is that a real person named Jesus called Christ was crucified by Pilate.

Well there are some people I understand who believe fiction to be true. I suggest you look at the many threads that discuss the reliability of those sources. As Origen mentions *Although not believing in Jesus as the Christ, Josephus when searching for the true cause of the fall of Jerusalem ought to have said that the persecution of Jesus was the cause of its ruin*

you are quite correct that Josephus does not say vespasian is the christ

Quote:

The majority [of the Jews] were convinced that the ancient scriptures of their priests alluded to the present as the very time when the Orient would triumph and from Judaea would go forth men destined to rule the world. This mysterious prophecy really referred to Vespasian and Titus, but the common people, true to the selfish ambitions of mankind, thought that this exalted destiny was reserved for them, and not even their calamities opened their eyes to the truth. (Tacitus, Histories)

yet Tacitus fails to connect his knowledge of Judean prophesy with Christians sorry Anointedians but then Christians were a popular religion in his time so everybody must have known what they were about, surely and especially someone as worldly as Pliny the younger?



06-24-2008, 09:53 AM

#9

Solitary Man

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2006

Location: ירושלים

Posts: 1,701



The appeal to authority to Van Voorst does little to boost either Toto's or Earl Doherty's argument. Does anyone else find it ironic that both appealed to someone who has doctrinal commitments to Christianity, while ignoring other apologists when it doesn't suit their needs? And to dismiss the Oxford Latin Dictionary by the authority of Van Voorst borders on the absurd and shows to what lengths these people hold on to their pet theories, with or without evidence. But contra Toto, that's not actually what Van Voorst was saying. Van Voorst is saying that we cannot place too much weight on the passage given historical credence to Jesus as a man. But this idea is contrary to the Latin of Pliny.

And all this without going into what Sherwin-White meant and how it relates to the discourse.

To the topic. For one, the primary meaning of the word is "as if" or "as though". It also denotes similarity to, for

example in our own texts, Christ is sung a hymn to *quasi* to a God, i.e. they both are sung hymns to.

Second, *quasi* *always* implies a difference in subjects. For example, even in legal texts (of which Pliny's letters are certainly not), some categories can serve in the capacity of another category via *quasi*, like the example given in OLD § 6: *si...quasi intercessor servus intervenerit, non rem peculiarem agens* "if...a slave has intervened as a surety" (Gaius, *Institutiones* 15.1.3.5). *Servus* as a whole isn't intercessor, but only in this particular instance, and only because the *servus* is acting in the capacity of the intercessor.

Pliny is no different here. It is not "to Christ *their* God" or "to their God Christ" (which would be expected), but to Christ *quasi* God. We can also thank Cicero, whom Pliny strove to be like, for giving us an example of what it would look like if Christ *was* God in "*De Finibus* 5.15.43, although it doesn't always mean that *it is such* formulated as such.

The vast majority of *quasi* in Pliny, though, is hypothetical, "as if, as though", and this is borne out just by a cursory glance at *quasi*. Take Book V, for instance:

V.1 - *quasi praemium* - (something) like a reward [not actually as the reward itself]

V.3 - *quasi...statuit* [William Melmout takes the *quasi* here as "so to speak"; Pliny is referring to something like advice, from context, but it's not a clear example]

ibid. - *quasi populum* + ellipsis of verb - as if I had invited the public into the auditorium, not my closest friends into my bedroom

V.6 - *quasi margine arbusta* - by a *quasi*-border of shrubs [here used as an adverb]

ibid. - *quasi novas alunt* - clearly as if here, as the *trifolium* isn't new

None follow *quasi* in the Cicero example I gave above, and four out of the first five clearly are of the hypothetical nature. So let's look at what Sherwin-White actually gives:

VIII.8:

Inde non loci devexitate, sed ipsa sui copia et quasi pondere impellitur.

I doubt this qualifies since *quasi* here is used adverbially and not conjunctively like in the letter to Trajan.

IX.23

Exprimere non possum, quam sit iucundum mihi quod nomina nostra quasi litterarum propria, non hominum, litteris redduntur, quod uterque nostrum his etiam e studiis notus, quibus aliter ignotus est.

Unfortunately, this defeats Doherty severely. For you see, the names Tacitus and Pliny were belonged to men (homines, g.pl. hominum), but here they were being used

as if there were literature itself!

Talk about pegs being taken down a notch, I think Doherty needs to go back and instead of arguing from authority, which may or may not be right, actually do his homework and evaluate the evidence himself.



06-24-2008, 10:26 AM

#10


Toto

Contributor

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Solitary Man** 
The appeal to authority to Van Voorst does little to boost either Toto's or Earl Doherty's argument.

I have not made an argument.

Quote:

... And to dismiss the Oxford Latin Dictionary by the authority of Van Voorst borders on the absurd

Nor have I dismissed the Oxford Latin Dictionary. I don't think that Van Voorst did either.

Quote:

.... But contra Toto, that's not actually what Van Voorst was saying. Van Voorst is saying that we cannot place too much weight on the passage given historical credence to Jesus as a man.

I'm not sure where you get the idea that I would disagree with that.

But I'm not convinced that even if Pliny meant that the Christians worshipped Christ "as if" he were a god, that this proves that their Christ was once a historical person - any more than worshipping Christ "as" a god would prove the opposite.



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Pliny's reference to Christ "Quasi Deo" - Christ as a god, or Christ as if a god? **Welcome, neilgodfrey.** You last visited: 08-09-2015 at 01:16 PM

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Greetings neilgodfrey,

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06-24-2008, 10:29 AM

#11

FathomFFI

Banned

Join Date: Jun 2008
Location: Alberta, Canada
Posts: 327



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Toto**

But I'm not convinced that even if Pliny meant that the Christians worshipped Christ "as if" he were a god, that this proves that their Christ was once a historical person - any more than worshipping Christ "as" a god would prove the opposite.

It offers no proof of any kind, other than the fact that Christians worshiped someone/something called Christ. All it can be used for is support in the collective of intelligence.

06-24-2008, 11:20 AM

#12

Solitary Man

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2006

Location: ירושלים

Posts: 1,701



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Toto** 
I have not made an argument.

Sorry, I took posting the Van Voorst stuff as support for Doherty's thesis. Sometimes I get you two confused.

Quote:

Nor have I dismissed the Oxford Latin Dictionary. I don't think that Van Voorst did either.

"Van Voorst does not place much weight on this." - You said that.

Quote:

I'm not sure where you get the idea that I would disagree with that.

Great! So long as we agree.

Quote:

But I'm not convinced that even if Pliny meant that the Christians worshipped Christ "as if" he were a god, that this proves that their Christ was once a historical person - any more than worshipping Christ "as" a god would prove the opposite.

I never said he did. In fact, I've listed Tacitus as the direct evidence for Christ existing. What Pliny shows is that Christians in the early 2nd century CE sang hymns to a man Christ just like they would to a God. Doherty has before used the passage to support his incorrect theory.



06-24-2008, 11:22 AM

#13

Toto

Contributor

Join Date: Jun 2000

Location: Los Angeles area

Posts: 40,549



Early first century? Do you mean late first, or early second?



06-24-2008, 11:27 AM

#14

Solitary Man

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2006

Location: ירושלים

Posts: 1,701



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Toto** 
Early first century? Do you mean late first, or early second?

Sorry, early 2nd.



06-24-2008, 02:12 PM

#15

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **SM**
The appeal to authority to Van Voorst does little to boost either Toto's or Earl Doherty's argument. Does anyone else find it ironic that both appealed to someone who has doctrinal commitments to Christianity, while ignoring other apologists when it doesn't suit their needs?

Van Voorst was hardly an appeal to authority, since I used him only to appeal to Sherwin-White. I'm quite sure S-W also had his doctrinal commitments, but at least he was able to see and accept a possible interpretation of Pliny which went against those commitments. Van Voorst simply dismissed it.

SM's appeal to legal texts is irrelevant. His admission about "primary meaning" acknowledges that there are other applications and understandings. Lest SM fall into the same kind of trap as did Fathom, I am not stating either the fact or the opinion that the phrase in Pliny definitely means a non-supposal. Only that it **can**, and therefore the statement or opinion in the other direction is not sure, which weakens the claim by those with doctrinal commitments that it indicates Pliny by "Christ" means, or likely means, an historical man named Jesus. Even Van Voorst recognized this and hedged his clear preference by admitting that "we should not place too much weight on this." That even a scholar with doctrinal commitments would make this admission is revealing, and yet I'm to be ridiculed and implied to be somehow dishonest because I "ironically" point this out about Van Voorst? SM's ad hominem disposition is showing.

Of course "quasi *always* implies a difference in subjects." Supposal or not, it can't be any other way. The two terms on either side of "quasi" are hardly identical, semantically speaking. If I say, "We should treat Bob as an adult," even if Bob *is* an adult, 'Bob' is still one category (the individual that he is) and 'adult' is another category (the class of humans over the age of whatever). Moreover, that phrase does not tell us whether in fact Bob is an adult or not. In SM's legal setting, he could be a minor and I am urging the court to try him for a crime as an adult. Or it could be that Bob is in fact an adult, but others are treating him as though he were a child. If the word "as", in my example, can be ambiguous, then we don't know one way or the other. Sherwin-White's point was simply that the word "quasi" *is* ambiguous, it can be supposal or not (and it doesn't matter what the proportionate ratio of such usage was). Therefore, there need be no "if" in the translation of Pliny's statement. That is all I am arguing.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **SM**
The vast majority of quasi in Pliny, though, is hypothetical, "as if, as though"...

What, are we arguing numbers here? Sherwin-White says: "quasi deo. 'as to god'. In Pliny quasi is used commonly without the idea of supposal." "Commonly" vs. "vast majority." Hmm. I wonder whose word one should accept? Does it matter? In any case, it seems that SM, in his examples, is latching onto every use of the word "quasi" rather than those appearances in which it is used as a word that clearly equates two things. The former have little if anything to say about how he meant it in the Trajan letter. "...as if I had invited the public..." does not link two categories. His "quasi margine arbusta – by a quasi-border of shrubs" is simply a comparative, "shrubs like a border." The "quasi premium" is saying that 'an approbation of others is a kind of reward.' That's a direct identification, not an "as if" and cannot entail that it is *not* a reward.

As for the two examples given by Sherwin-White, the first *is* actually supposal entailing a falsity, the trees are reflected so clearly in the water as if they were planted there. (I am not sure whether S-W can be faulted here, since the note ("Cf."—which means "compare") in his linked piece does not clearly state that his two examples are examples of "without supposal" or simply comparisons with the contrary.) But let's look at the other example SM focuses on. Here I will not insult the others on the board by failing to give an English translation as SM did, which was hardly him assuming that everyone is so familiar with Latin that they don't need one, but rather touting his own knowledge as superior to theirs (or at least wanting to convey that impression) in not needing one himself.

Quote:

Exprimere non possum, quam sit iucundum mihi quod nomina nostra quasi litterarum propria, non hominum, litteris redduntur, quod uterque nostrum his etiam e studiis notus, quibus aliter ignotus est.

I cannot tell you how pleasing it is to me that our names are assigned to literature as (if) belonging to literature rather than to humans, that we are both known by our writing to those who would not otherwise know of us.

I'm not sure I see how "this defeats Doherty severely." SM says (sic): "For you see, the names Tacitus and Pliny were belonged to men (homines, g.pl. hominum), but here they were being used as if there [presumably they] were literature itself!" First of all, you will note that dropping the word "if" in the translation above does not affect the meaning. Is Pliny supposed to be saying that we do *not* belong to literature? What is literature but the people who

write it? Is there a distinction being made between the man and his name here? Most importantly, can this possibly be a parallel with the Trajan passage, in which SM would claim that the first category has to signify a man who should *not* be equated with a god?

"He talks as if he knew everything there is to know." That clearly implies that his 'talk' and 'knowing everything' is not a legitimate equation. That is not the kind of idea that Pliny wants to get across in his letter to Tacitus.

However, I do see a degree of "supposal" here, which makes me double my query about Sherwin-White and doubt that he is offering these two examples as support for his statement that "quasi is commonly used without the idea of supposal." Too bad we can't confirm that with him.

But all that aside. We need to evaluate the Trajan passage as much on its own merits as on comparison with other usages of "quasi" in Pliny, particularly as the word appears in several different kinds of contexts throughout the letters. No one is saying that Pliny's phrase is to be literally translated "to Christ their God." He would have used other words (with no "quasi") if that is all he wanted to say. My friend John gives me a lot of money. I write a letter "to John as my benefactor." (Maybe I even sing him a hymn.) John *is* my benefactor, my "as" links and equates, for those purposes, the two categories on either side. Strictly speaking, the "as" isn't even necessary; I could have said I wrote a letter "to John, my benefactor." But I didn't, and it is quite acceptable for me to have said it as I did. What I would *not* have said is that I wrote a letter "to John as *if* to a benefactor," because that implies that somehow he was not such, or did not deserve to be regarded as such. It would imply that I knew John was really not a benefactor (perhaps he had given me counterfeit money).

Of course, this is the implication that defenders of an HJ *want* to bring to Pliny's phrase, that he was referring to someone who was *not* a god, or did not merit having that assumption brought to him. Whereas "they sang a hymn to Christ as a god" contains no such necessary implication. Why phrase it that way, instead of merely 'to Christ their God'? For that, we need to consider the nature of the category "Christ." It was not the same as saying that Mithraists sang a hymn 'to Mithras their God.' Everyone knew who Mithras was, that he belonged in the category "god." To say "to Mithras as a god" would be at best redundant, at worst faintly contradictory since it could convey the idea that it would be possible not to think of Mithras as a god. Do I need go on? Not everyone, certainly not the emperor nor the average Roman, nor probably even Pliny himself before he talked to Christians, would automatically regard "Christ" as a god. In fact, if they knew anything about Jewish messianism, they would definitely think of "Messiah" as a human. Therefore, Pliny would naturally want to convey that the category "Christ" was being treated by the Christians "as"—or even "as if"—he were a god.

When it comes down to it, SM's objections are really moot, because in the context of Pliny's statement, neither "as" nor "as if" would have to convey that for Pliny the "Christ" is likely to be a human man.

Earl Doherty



06-25-2008, 02:36 AM

#16

Solitary Man

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2006

Location: ירושלים

Posts: 1,701



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** [▶](#)
Van Voorst was hardly an appeal to authority, since I used him only to appeal to Sherwin-White.

Oh, I'm so tragically sorry - you appealed to Sherwin-White instead. Big difference. 🙄

Quote:

I'm quite sure S-W also had his doctrinal commitments, but at least he was able to see and accept a possible interpretation of Pliny which went against those commitments. Van Voorst simply dismissed it.

I *highly* doubt that Sherwin-White had mythicism in mind when he wrote that very brief note on Pliny. In fact, I think he had some other doctrinal commitment in mind, i.e. that Jesus *was* God. Oh, but how we love to take things out of context and twist them for our own purposes, eh Doherty? Just like what you do to Paul!

Quote:

SM's appeal to legal texts is irrelevant.

If you notice, I didn't appeal to the legal texts. I explicitly said that Pliny was not a legal text.

Quote:

His admission about "primary meaning" acknowledges that there are other applications and understandings.

I think here you're seriously abusing the nature of Latin words. How many years did you have of Latin again? What did you write your thesis on? Can you show me something substantial instead of wriggling around grasping for straws. Do you have any direct evidence? No?

Quote:

Lest SM fall into the same kind of trap as did Fathom, I am not stating either the fact or the

opinion that the phrase in Pliny definitely means a non-supposal. Only that it **can**, and therefore the statement or opinion in the other direction is not sure, which weakens the claim by those with doctrinal commitments that it indicates Pliny by "Christ" means, or likely means, an historical man named Jesus.

False. Merely acknowledging the possibility of different interpretations does not negate the strength of the one best supported. That's fallacious reasoning at its best.

Quote:

Even Van Voorst recognized this and hedged his clear preference by admitting that "we should not place too much weight on this."

Van Voorst is trying to combat the charge that we have evidence of Jesus' existence, of which Pliny is a poor witness. In that regard, it is to be accepted that Pliny is not trying to say one way or another that Jesus was human. But in using quasi he has implied that Jesus was human, and these Christians sing songs to him as if [they were singing a hymn] to a God.

Quote:

That even a scholar with doctrinal commitments would make this admission is revealing, and yet I'm to be ridiculed and implied to be somehow dishonest because I "ironically" point this out about Van Voorst? SM's ad hominem disposition is showing.

I question Van Voorst's judgment. So going on about it *is* an appeal to authority - or rather, it's a fake argument from embarrassment. You're trying to say that a Christian with doctrinal commitments couldn't be led astray by faulty reasoning or other authority figures?

Quote:

Of course "quasi *always* implies a difference in subjects." Supposal or not, it can't be any other way.

Yes! I'm glad that got across to you.

Quote:

The two terms on either side of "quasi" are hardly identical, semantically speaking. If I say, "We should treat Bob as an adult," even if Bob *is* an adult, 'Bob' is still one category (the individual that he is) and 'adult' is another category (the class of humans over the age of whatever).

You actually have two options for this one, and it

dramatically changes the reasoning. For one, if Bob *isn't* an adult, then it's a normal use of quasi, that he should be treated in the hypothetical circumstances that he would be an adult (or in plainer English, "as if he were an adult", or merely "as an adult", but the latter one is too ambiguous, and thus why I clarified in the beginning). This one is without direct equation (idea of supposal just isn't used, as far as I can tell).

The second option is that of direct equation. If Bob *were an adult*, then the use of quasi would imply that Bob *isn't being treated as one*. So while categorically speaking Bob and adult are equal, the difference lies in the action to Bob and to adults, i.e. though Bob is an adult, *other adults* are treated differently from Bob.

And finally from the legal texts we get one more, one where Bob (servus) *isn't normally* an adult (intercessor), but that he acts in the capacity of one. In standard prose, you don't see *quasi* used that way a lot (check the OLD for yourself). In fact, the only citations I saw in the OLD were of legal texts. I do remember seeing *ut* or *uti* used that way.

Quote:

Moreover, that phrase does not tell us whether in fact Bob is an adult or not.

Not directly, though that can be inferred from the context. And taking from my outline of the two situations seen, in order for Jesus not to be a God, we would not have seen him being treated as one. Now, even I will admit that it's not a surefire thing, but it's what fits the evidence best, in my opinion. And quite frankly, I don't see you putting up anything else.

Quote:

In SM's legal setting, he could be a minor and I am urging the court to try him for a crime as an adult. Or it could be that Bob is in fact an adult, but others are treating him as though he were a child. If the word "as", in my example, can be ambiguous, then we don't know one way or the other. Sherwin-White's point was simply that the word "quasi" *is* ambiguous, it can be supposal or not (and it doesn't matter what the proportionate ratio of such usage was). Therefore, there need be no "if" in the translation of Pliny's statement. That is all I am arguing.

I disagree. I outlined my reasons. You're relying way too heavily on ignorance. This is unnecessary considering the surrounding circumstances. Remember, *quasi* isn't the normal word for "as", even though Earl is pretending that it is.

Quote:

What, are we arguing numbers here? Sherwin-White says: "quasi deo. 'as to god'.

"Sherwin-White says" is not a valid argument. Sherwin-White also says that Jesus died and was raised again on the third day. Sherwin-White also says that there is a God. Appeals to authority are nada.

Quote:

Hmmm. I wonder whose word one should accept? Does it matter? In any case, it seems that SM, in his examples, is latching onto every use of the word "quasi" rather than those appearances in which it is used as a word that clearly equates two things.

Actually, I picked the first ones out of book five, which was the first epistle I clicked on when I searching through his works under site:<http://thelatinlibrary.com/pliny/> - oh the marvels of Google.

Quote:

The former have little if anything to say about how he meant it in the Trajan letter. "...as if I had invited the public..." does not link two categories. His "quasi margine arbusta – by a quasi-border of shrubs" is simply a comparative, "shrubs like a border." The "quasi premium" is saying that 'an approbation of others is a kind of reward.' That's a direct identification, not an "as if" and cannot entail that it is *not* a reward.

Praemia is the booty or spoils from war. It usually had monetary value. It's like we saying today, "just seeing you smile is my reward". However, when someone sees a sign that says, "Lost Dog: If Found, Big Reward", they're not thinking of seeing them smile as their reward. That is what Pliny is saying here.

Quote:

As for the two examples given by Sherwin-White, the first *is* actually supposal entailing a falsity, the trees are reflected so clearly in the water as if they were planted there. (I am not sure whether S-W can be faulted here, since the note ("Cf."— which means "compare") in his linked piece does not clearly state that his two examples are examples of "without supposal" or simply comparisons with the contrary.)

Really, Doherty? Really? Does Sherwin-White use cf. anywhere else with examples to the contrary? Does anyone? Standard scholarly literature shows that cf. is to be compared with *like* examples. I've always seen "for the opposite" *vel sim.* for comparisons to the contrary.

Quote:

But let's look at the other example SM focuses on. Here I will not insult the others on the board by failing to give an English translation as SM did, which was hardly him assuming that everyone is so familiar with Latin that they don't need one, but rather touting his own knowledge as superior to theirs (or at least wanting to convey that impression) in not needing one himself.

No, I figured the major players here know Latin. Ben Smith, Roger Pearse, myself, and...you?

Quote:

Exprimere non possum, quam sit iucundum mihi quod nomina nostra quasi litterarum propria, non hominum, litteris redduntur, quod uterque nostrum his etiam e studiis notus, quibus aliter ignotus est.

Quote:

First of all, you will note that dropping the word "if" in the translation above does not affect the meaning. Is Pliny supposed to be saying that we do *not* belong to literature?

What is *propria*? What does it modify? I'm starting to doubt your Latin, Earl.

Quote:

What is literature but the people who write it?

Literature is not the people who write it, but what is written by the people. Pliny is happy that their *names* are being appropriated to literature. In English, it's common to say, "I read Joyce yesterday." (Well, that particular phrase might not be so common, though it should be.) But Joyce isn't actually anything but a dead human. Pliny and Tacitus are people, not literary works. So Pliny is happy to hear that when speaking of the best literature of the times, the questioner automatically asks, "Tacitus or Pliny?"

Quote:

Is there a distinction being made between the man and his name here?

Yes!

Quote:

Most importantly, can this possibly be a parallel with the Trajan passage, in which SM would claim that the first category has to signify a man who should *not* be equated with a god?

Yes!

Quote:

"He talks as if he knew everything there is to know." That clearly implies that his 'talk' and 'knowing everything' is not a legitimate equation. That is not the kind of idea that Pliny wants to get across in his letter to Tacitus.

This, however, is a false parallel. Now we're speaking of legitimacy, but this is an English idiom, and I'm afraid isn't that obvious from the Latin.

Quote:

However, I do see a degree of "supposal" here, which makes me double my query about Sherwin-White and doubt that he is offering these two examples as support for his statement that "quasi is commonly used without the idea of supposal." Too bad we can't confirm that with him.

I'm glad that's accepted. I also wonder what Sherwin-White had in mind, because the examples he gives are sloppy to begin with (*quasi* is not used conjunctively with the first) and ending in the opposite direction.

Quote:

But all that aside. We need to evaluate the Trajan passage as much on its own merits as on comparison with other usages of "quasi" in Pliny, particularly as the word appears in several different kinds of contexts throughout the letters.

Why, excellent! If you've forgotten why, see way above.

Quote:

No one is saying that Pliny's phrase is to be literally translated "to Christ their God." He would have used other words (with no "quasi") if that is all he wanted to say.

Yep! So he introduces quasi, which means that Christ isn't actually a God. I'm glad we've cleared this up.

Quote:

Of course, this is the implication that defenders of an HJ *want* to bring to Pliny's phrase, that he was referring to someone who was *not* a god, or did not merit having that assumption brought to him. Whereas "they sang a hymn to Christ as a god" contains no such necessary implication.

Not on its own, it doesn't. But surrounding context dictates otherwise.

Quote:

Why phrase it that way, instead of merely 'to Christ their God'?

Because I fear we should have seen the Latin differently, if that were the case.

Quote:

Do I need go on? Not everyone, certainly not the emperor nor the average Roman, nor probably even Pliny himself before he talked to Christians, would automatically regard "Christ" as a god.

But the mere fact that he used Christo quasi deo is telling enough that he's not directly comparing the two.

Quote:

In fact, if they knew anything about Jewish messianism, they would definitely think of "Messiah" as a human.

A much doubtful assumption. They probably didn't, because they don't mention that they do.

Quote:

When it comes down to it, SM's objections are really moot, because in the context of Pliny's statement, neither "as" nor "as if" would have to convey that for Pliny the "Christ" is likely to be a human man.

All that typing, Earl, and really all you wanted to convey was that we are ignorant of what he was saying and therefore cannot make a judgment, when in reality it is you who do not know. A pity.



06-30-2008, 06:32 PM

#17

neilgodfrey

Senior Member

Join Date: Mar 2005

Location: Darwin, Australia

Posts: 874



As a latecomer to this discussion, one silly question: To whom were hymns sung? What type or class of being?

As for the discussion over the meaning of quasi, I was left with a question mark hanging over the following exchange:

ED says:

Quote:

His admission about "primary meaning" acknowledges that there are other applications and understandings.

SM replies:

Quote:

I think here you're seriously abusing the nature of Latin words. How many years did you have of Latin again? What did you write your thesis on? Can you show me something substantial instead of wriggling around grasping for straws. Do you have any direct evidence? No?

Since SM did not refute ED's statement that there are other applications and understandings of the word, and implied rather that one can only understand the true meaning of the word if one undergoes multiple years of study of the Latin language and writes a doctoral thesis, am I beyond hope of ever understanding the meaning of this word -- and whether (like a good many words) it indeed really can have more than one application and understanding? Or is this knowledge to be reserved for major players who read Joyce and to be kept hidden from anyone who needs a translation?

Alternately, please explain how the statement addressed is a "serious abuse of the nature of Latin words".

Neil Godfrey



06-30-2008, 09:53 PM

#18

Roger Pearse

Veteran Member

Join Date: Apr 2002

Location: N/A

Posts: 4,370



Earl, quasi usually means "as if"; literally 'qua-si'. I was unaware that there might be some unusual usage here, on which of course I would have no special view. Nor was I taking a position on this, except to ensure that people arguing about a word had access to the Latin.

But is the difference (in English) between "as if to a god" and "as to a god" more than infinitesimal? Is anyone really going to build an argument on the interpretation of a single word, either way? I don't believe that such an argument could be sound.

But probably I don't understand the point at issue.



07-01-2008, 10:41 AM

#19

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005

Location: Ontario, Canada

Posts: 1,435



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Roger**
But is the difference (in English) between "as if to a god" and "as to a god" more than infinitesimal? Is anyone really going to build an argument on the interpretation of a single word, either way? I don't believe that such an argument could be sound.

I certainly agree. And I am not presuming to build an argument on "quasi" designed to prove that Pliny must be referring to Christ **as** a god, but to disqualify those who maintain the opposite, that the "if" indicates Pliny is referring to a Christ whom he knows is **not** a god. As though the underlying meaning by Pliny is something like: "They worshiped Christ as though he were a god, but of course, sir, we all know that he wasn't, but was rather a crucified criminal."

As for the difference in English, an "if" implies something that in fact is not:

"You are coming me as if I had the answer." This implies I* don't.

Whereas, with no "if," such an implication is not there:

"You are coming to me as having the answer." Which implies that I do, you know it, and I'll give it to you.

[*edited to change "you" to "I", which is what I meant to say]

Earl Doherty



07-02-2008, 02:43 PM

#20


patcleaver

Senior Member

Join Date: Nov 2007
Location: New York
Posts: 742



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 

*I certainly agree. And I am not presuming to build an argument on "quasi" designed to prove that Pliny must be referring to Christ **as** a god, but to disqualify those who maintain the opposite, that the "if" indicates Pliny is referring to a Christ whom he knows is **not** a god. As though the underlying meaning by Pliny is something like: "They worshiped Christ as though he were a god, but of course, sir, we all know that he wasn't, but was rather a crucified criminal."*

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Whereas, with no "if," such an implication is not there:

"You are coming to me as having the answer." Which implies that I do, you know it, and I'll give it to you.

*[*edited to change "you" to "I", which is what I*

meant to say]

Earl Doherty

Does quasi apply to whether Christ is god or does it apply to how they honor him.

So in your opinion which of these 4 (or something else) is closest to the the meaning of Pliny in greek.

1. They honor Christ as if he were a god.
2. They honor Christ as a god.
3. They honor Christ as if honoring a god.
4. They honor Christ as they would honor a god.



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Pliny's reference to Christ "Quasi Deo" - Christ as a god, or Christ as if a god?

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07-02-2008, 03:41 PM

#21

aa5874

Contributor

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by [patcleaver](#)

Does quasi apply to whether Christ is god or does it apply to how they honor him.

So in your opinion which of these 4 (or something else) is closest to the the meaning of Pliny in greek.

1. *They honor Christ as if he were a god.*
2. *They honor Christ as a god.*
3. *They honor Christ as if honoring a god.*
4. *They honor Christ as they would honor a god.*

These questions cannot really be answered, until it can be

ascertained who this Christ actually was, human or supernatural.

Did Pliny know what a docetist was? When did docetism begin?

To think that there was only one person or supernatural entity ever called Christ is to be completely naive about antiquity.

In addition, the Pliny letters have nothing about Jesus of Nazareth.



07-02-2008, 03:53 PM

#22

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **patcleaver**
Does quasi apply to whether Christ is god or does it apply to how they honor him.

So in your opinion which of these 4 (or something else) is closest to the the meaning of Pliny in greek.

1. *They honor Christ as if he were a god.*
2. *They honor Christ as a god.*
3. *They honor Christ as if honoring a god.*
4. *They honor Christ as they would honor a god.*

To answer that we'd have to get inside Pliny's mind. All I am saying is that we can't automatically say it is one of those four, especially one that implies *a priori* that Christ is not a god and Pliny knows it. But let's consider the implications of each one (in English).

"They honor Christ as if he were a god." This has the implication that the speaker does not consider Christ to be a god, and is somewhat skeptical or unsympathetic to any idea that he was.

"They honor Christ as a god." This implies no more than that Pliny is aware that the entity they honor is named "Christ" and that he is a god. This is pretty neutral, and of the four is the least supportive of an historical Jesus in Pliny's mind.

"They honor Christ as if honoring a god." Not much different from the first one, although perhaps less skeptical and with less critical overtones.

"They honor Christ as they would honor a god." This definitely (to me) has the implication that Christ is not a god.

Like I said, I can't tell what Pliny has in mind. But if "quasi" is not necessarily "supposal" so that it does not

necessarily mean that the "if" object is NOT what is claimed, then Pliny's language cannot be used to support the historical Jesus position, or that Pliny in any way means to imply that he knows of, or has accepted on the basis of Christian reporting the existence of, an historical man whom the Christians have deified.

Of course, it is always possible that those Christians *did* tell him of a historical man whom *they* believed existed and regarded as a god, and Pliny simply accepted that. Perhaps a lot like Tacitus, who may have been told by Christians, or others reporting Christian beliefs, about a historical man and simply accepted that such a man existed and was executed by Pilate.

Then, as I said before, there is the matter of "Christ" being a distinctive term. It isn't as if Pliny is saying, Christians worship John Smith as a god. John Smith clearly implies the original object of worship was a human being. We don't know if Pliny was familiar with the term "Christ" or what it meant to him, nor can we know what he thought the reader would imagine the term represented. Yet he seems to throw out the term with no explanation, not even to the emperor, as though he expected no problem in understanding. This does not ring true, and is one of the factors which argues for non-authenticity.

Arguments in this whole issue by mythicists are simply designed to undercut the claims of historicists that 'witnesses' like Pliny and Tacitus can or should be taken as reliable indicators, even proofs, that Jesus existed. We simply have to discredit their reliability, or discredit the reliability of historicists' interpretation of them.

Earl Doherty



07-03-2008, 08:52 AM

#23

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005

Location: Ontario, Canada

Posts: 1,435



I have just made a curious observation about the "quasi" passage.

Tertullian, in Apology II.6, refers in some detail to the Pliny letter, virtually a paraphrase of its key part:

Quote:

...explaining to his master [Trajan] that, except an obstinate disinclination to offer sacrifices, he found in the religious services nothing but meetings at early morning for singing hymns to Christ **and** [Latin: et] God [alternate reading: **as** [Latin: ut] God], and sealing home their way of life by a united pledge to be faithful to their religion, forbidding murder, adultery, dishonesty, and other crimes.

Why would Tertullian not reproduce the most important

part of the passage as Pliny supposedly wrote it, **quasi** Deo? We can't really tell if he wrote "et" or "ut", but surely he did not write "quasi" and this was lost from the manuscript transmission of his Apology. I can't quite decide yet whether this could somehow be turned into ammunition for the skeptics who suggest the Pliny letter is not authentic. (Drews makes a brief, unargued suggestion that the passage in Tertullian is itself "doubtful", but I think that's a stretch.)

Perhaps Ben or Roger would have a comment on this? I also understand that the book of Pliny's letters containing this one was not published in Pliny's lifetime. Does anyone know when exactly it was published? (Sometime before Tertullian, of course, but how soon after Pliny's death?)

Earl Doherty



07-03-2008, 11:28 AM

#24

Minimalist

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2007
Location: Arizona
Posts: 1,808



Quote:

I can't quite decide yet whether this could somehow be turned into ammunition for the skeptics who suggest the Pliny letter is not authentic.

I can't understand why a Christian forger would go to the trouble of forging a document which trashes one of the cherished images of Christians, Earl. Namely that martyrs willingly died for the faith. Pliny makes it clear that most gladly sacrificed to Roman gods and were sent on their way. And Trajan was totally cool with that!

I'm as skeptical as they come but I can't see any reason for a "Christian" forger to make up a story that is so contrary to the tale they wanted told.



07-03-2008, 11:52 AM

#25


mountainman

Contributor

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
(Drews makes a brief, unargued suggestion that the passage in Tertullian is itself "doubtful", but I think that's a stretch.)

Do not dismiss the possibility that Tertullian is Eusebius. If the 123 literary letters of 'Alciphron' were written in the 2nd century CE as an example of historical fiction purporting to be from the 4th century BC, who is to say the "authors such as Tertullian" presented by Eusebius in

the fourth century, to be writing profusely during the second century, in Latin, during the greatest revival of the greek literature, are not of the same genre?

Ancient historical truth does not care about our preconceptions.
Select your postulates with caution.

Best wishes,

Pete



07-04-2008, 03:30 AM

#26


gstafleu

Veteran Member

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
As though the underlying meaning by Pliny is something like: "They worshiped Christ as though he were a god, but of course, sir, we all know that he wasn't, but was rather a crucified criminal."

If Pliny was a "pagan," i.e. not a Christian, he probably didn't think that Christ was a god. Could his meaning then simply be something like: "They worshiped Christ as though he were a god, but of course, sir, we all know that he wasn't, because Jupiter et al are the real gods"? Do I understand correctly that Pliny's letter was addressed to the emperor? Given that the emperor was seen to be god-like himself, such a disclaimer might be advisable ("but of course, sir, we all know that he wasn't, you are the local god-on-earth").

[That might perhaps explain why Tertullian changed (if he did) the "quasi" to "ut": that would go less against the Christian grain.]

Gerard Stafleu



07-04-2008, 04:30 AM

#27


Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
Tertullian, in Apology II.6, refers in some detail to the Pliny letter, virtually a paraphrase of its key part:

Quote:

...explaining to his master [Trajan] that, except an obstinate disinclination to offer sacrifices, he found in the religious

services nothing but meetings at early morning for singing hymns to Christ **and** [Latin: et] God [alternate reading: **as** [Latin: ut] God], and sealing home their way of life by a united pledge to be faithful to their religion, forbidding murder, adultery, dishonesty, and other crimes.

*Why would Tertullian not reproduce the most important part of the passage as Pliny supposedly wrote it, **quasi** Deo? We can't really tell if he wrote "et" or "ut", but surely he did not write "quasi" and this was lost from the manuscript transmission of his Apology. I can't quite decide yet whether this could somehow be turned into ammunition for the skeptics who suggest the Pliny letter is not authentic. (Drews makes a brief, unargued suggestion that the passage in Tertullian is itself "doubtful", but I think that's a stretch.)*

Perhaps Ben or Roger would have a comment on this?

I have this Tertullianic paraphrase, both in Latin and in English, [on my page on the Pliny passage](#).

I think your characterization of it as a *paraphrase* is spot on. Here is the relevant section; I have tried to translate over-literally to preserve the verbal correspondences as best I can. Tertullian, *Apology* 2.6:

...nihil aliud se de **sacramentis** eorum comperisse quam coetus **antelucanos** ad canendum **Christo** et [ut?] **deo** et ad confoederandam disciplinam, homicidium, **adulterium**, fraudem, perfidiam, et cetera **scelera** prohibentes.

...he had found out nothing else about their sacraments other than prelight meetings to sing to Christ and [as to?] God and toward a confederate discipline, prohibiting murder, adultery, fraud, perfidy, and other crimes.

Confer the relevant portion of Pliny, epistle 10.96:

...quod essent soliti stato die **ante lucem** convenire, carmenque **Christo** quasi **deo** dicere secum invicem, seque **sacramento** non in **scelus** aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta ne latrocinia ne **adulteria** committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum appellati abnegarent.

...that they were accustomed to meeting on a certain fixed day before the light, and to saying a song alternately to Christ as if to a god, and to binding themselves by a sacrament, not to crimes, but to commit neither furtive deeds, nor theft, nor adultery, nor to falsify faith, nor to deny a trust when

called upon.

I have tried to **boldface** all the verbal overlaps in the Latin; did I miss any? I could probably get this close myself from sheer memory. Is it possible that Tertullian is doing just that, recalling from memory?

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**
*Why would Tertullian not reproduce the most important part of the passage as Pliny supposedly wrote it, **quasi** Deo?*

I do not think there is much doubt that the *quasi deo* part is not the most important part to Tertullian. Surely what matters to him here is the procedure against the Christians (as he writes: *In our case no such procedure is followed*); the lack of hard criminality on the part of the Christians underlines the necessity for such procedure; the *et deo, ut deo, or quasi deo* is just a tagalong, so far as Tertullian is concerned.

Ben.



07-04-2008, 05:31 AM

#28


aa5874

Contributor

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith** 
...he had found out nothing else about their sacraments other than prelight meetings to sing to Christ and [as to?] God and toward a confederate discipline, prohibiting murder, adultery, fraud, perfidy, and other crimes.[/INDENT]

So, Christ in this case is a spiritual being. These Christians are singing to him. I would believe they think Christ and /[as a] God can hear them singing.



07-04-2008, 06:58 AM

#29


Roger Pearse

Veteran Member

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith** 
I do not think there is much doubt that the quasi deo part is not the most important part to Tertullian. Surely what matters to him here is the procedure against the Christians

I think so too. After all, no-one in antiquity denied that Jesus existed, however much they hated the Christians. On

the contrary, they found him useful, as a reason to deride a group founded by such a man.

All the best,

Roger Pearse



07-04-2008, 07:05 AM

#30

No Robots

Veteran Member

Join Date: Jan 2006
Location: Edmonton
Posts: 5,679



It is possible that Tertullian left off the "quasi Deo" part precisely out of orthodox squeamishness about the the implied suggestion therein that Christ *is not* a god. That is to say that Pliny seems to take it for granted that Christ is a man whom his followers take as something like a god. By the time of Tertullian, the Church was in the process of trying to suppress this kind of outlook. It looks to me that Tertullian is censoring Pliny in order to conceal the evidence that Christ was originally understood by the Romans to have been completely and exclusively human.



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Pliny's reference to Christ "Quasi Deo" - Christ as a god, or Christ as if a god?

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Greetings neilgodfrey,

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07-04-2008, 07:09 AM

#31

[andrewcriddle](#)

Veteran Member

Join Date: Sep 2004

Location: Birmingham UK

Posts: 4,876



Quote:

Originally Posted by [EarlDoherty](#)
I have just made a curious observation about the "quasi" passage.

Tertullian, in Apology II.6, refers in some detail to the Pliny letter, virtually a paraphrase of its key part:

Quote:

...explaining to his master [Trajan] that, except an obstinate disinclination to offer sacrifices, he found in the religious services nothing but meetings at early morning for singing hymns to Christ **and** [Latin: et] God [alternate reading: **as**

[Latin: ut] God], and sealing home their way of life by a united pledge to be faithful to their religion, forbidding murder, adultery, dishonesty, and other crimes.

*Why would Tertullian not reproduce the most important part of the passage as Pliny supposedly wrote it, **quasi** Deo? We can't really tell if he wrote "et" or "ut", but surely he did not write "quasi" and this was lost from the manuscript transmission of his Apology.*

I think Tertullian must have written **some** form of "as God"

In the Greek translation of Tertullian quoted by Eusebius in Ecclesiastical History Book 3 chapter 33 we have "hymn Christ as [a] God" *TON CHRISTON THEOU DIKHN hUMNEIN*. *THEOU DIKHN* being literally "after the manner of God".

Andrew Criddle



07-04-2008, 07:14 AM

#32


gstafleu

Veteran Member

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **No Robots** 
*That is to say that **Pliny seems to take it for granted that Christ is a man** whom his followers take as something like a god.*

(My bold)

He does? Can it not be that Pliny simply thinks Christ is not a god? Or maybe a "false god"? I'm not sure what necessitates the conclusion that Pliny thought of Christ as a man, the passage under discussion does not seem sufficient for that. Maybe there is other evidence that Pliny thought of Christ as a man? In that case it would be reasonable to assume that Pliny also thinks of Christ as a man in this passage, but lacking that the most we can say is that Pliny may have doubted Christ's divinity--whether he was a man, a cow, or simply something that didn't (as far as Pliny was concerned) exist.

Gerard Stafleu



07-04-2008, 07:14 AM

#33


Ben C Smith

Veteran Member

Join Date: May 2005
Location: Midwest



Quote:

Originally Posted by **No Robots** 

Posts: 4,787

It looks to me that Tertullian is censoring Pliny in order to conceal the evidence that Christ was originally understood by the Romans to have been completely and exclusively human.

Censoring is an awfully strong word, especially as Tertullian is only paraphrasing anyway.

Ben.



07-04-2008, 07:51 AM

#34


No Robots

Veteran Member

Join Date: Jan 2006
Location: Edmonton
Posts: 5,679



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Ben C Smith** 
Censoring is an awfully strong word, especially as Tertullian is only paraphrasing anyway.

Blackmail is such an ugly word. I prefer extortion, the "X" makes it sound cool.-Bender.

Maybe I should say Xorship. 😊



07-05-2008, 12:26 PM

#35

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

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



Some interesting observations from all of you. Thanks.

We have, of course, to presume that Tertullian automatically regarded Pliny as assuming that the "Christ" he is referring to was a man. I don't think it would have crossed his mind at the end of the 2nd century that Pliny's use of "quasi" could possibly be taken to mean that for him "Christ" had been anything other than a man. So I don't think he would have 'censored' Pliny by eliminating the "quasi" on account of a possible undesirable connotation.

It's probably just a case of a lack of accurate familiarity with the original on Tertullian's part. What one wants to read into that is one's own prerogative. Of course, he's so wound up in those first few chapters of the Apology about the injustice of Christian persecution, it would be no wonder if he got a few wires crossed.

(I wonder how that impression Tertullian creates of the anti-Christian situation of his day (it's like he's living in a slasher movie) sits with those who claim that the whole persecution thing before Diocletian has been vastly exaggerated and even misrepresented by early Christians.)

Earl Doherty



07-05-2008, 07:49 PM

#36

Roger Pearse

Veteran Member

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**

I wonder how that impression Tertullian creates of the anti-Christian situation of his day (it's like he's living in a slasher movie) sits with those who claim that the whole persecution thing before Diocletian has been vastly exaggerated and even misrepresented by early Christians.

Not least since he's in danger of being arrested himself (*Scorpiace* 1:1).

But I think we all know how the revisionism ploy for doing down our foes works these days by playing down whatever misfortunes have afflicted him; and likewise the reverse revisionism, of painting our own group as perennial victims in order to stifle criticism and allow us to advance our claims for privileges. Neither should influence us, IMHO.

All the best,

Roger Pearse



07-05-2008, 08:03 PM

#37

Roger Pearse

Veteran Member

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



Quote:

Originally Posted by **andrewcriddle**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty**

I have just made a curious observation about the "quasi" passage.

Tertullian, in Apology II.6, refers in some detail to the Pliny letter, virtually a paraphrase of its key part:

Quote:

Why would Tertullian not reproduce the most important part of the passage as Pliny supposedly wrote it, **quasi** Deo? We can't really tell if he wrote "et" or "ut", but surely he did not write "quasi" and this was lost from the manuscript transmission of his Apology.

*I think Tertullian must have written **some** form of "as God"*

In the Greek translation of Tertullian quoted by Eusebius in Ecclesiastical History Book 3 chapter 33 we have "hymn Christ as [a] God" ΤΟΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΝ ΤΗΕΟΥ ΔΙΚΗΝ ΗΜΝΕΙΝ. ΤΗΕΟΥ ΔΙΚΗΝ being literally "after the manner of God".

Interesting indeed. Possibly the text of the *Apologeticum* is corrupt at that point. There is no ms. witness before 800, and there is a suggestion that this work of Tertullian may have been interfered with in Carolingian times in the interest of making it easier to understand. However the alternative text, of the Fulda recension, is not different:

I've now gone to look at the *CSEL* edition of this work. "Christo et deo" is given, as the witness of all the manuscripts, including the lost Fulda manuscript which displayed a rather different text; "Christo ut deo" is given as the reading in a manuscript collated by Heraldus. The apparatus gives Pliny "quasi deo", Eusebius QEOU DIKHN, and Jerome's *Chronicle* for 2124 AA (108 AD) as "christum ut deum":

Latin:

a Plinius Secundus, cum quamdam provinciam regeret, et in magistratu suo plurimos Christianorum interfecisset, multitudo eorum perterritus, quaesivit a Trajano, quid facto opus esset, nuntians ei, Praeter obstinationem non sacrificandi, et antelucanos coetus ad canendum cuidam Christo ut Deo, nihil apud eos reperiri. Praeterea ad confoederandam disciplinam, vetari ab his homicidia, furta, adulteria, latrocinia, et his similia. Ad quae commotus Trajanus rescribit: "Hoc genus quidem inquirendum non esse, oblatos vero puniri oportere." Tertullianus refert in *Apologetico*.

English:

a When Pliny the Younger was ruling a certain province and had put to death many Christians in his capacity as governor, he became frightened by their great numbers and sought from Trajan what he should do, reporting to him that, except for their stubborn refusal to sacrifice and their predawn gatherings to sing to a certain Christ as to a god, there was nothing (unusual) to be found among them. Furthermore, in order to be united in a common way of life, they forbid themselves to commit murder, theft, adultery, robbery, and the like. Disturbed by these things, Trajan wrote back: "This kind of people should not be sought out, but when they are brought before you, it is fitting for them to be punished." Tertullian refers to all this in his *Apology*.

This would tend to suggest that the text is correct as it has reached us.

I suppose possibly the Greek translation of the *Apologeticum* used by Eusebius might have used some Greek translation of Pliny's *Letters* to help out at that point; but there seems no need to suppose so. The translator of this didn't understand Latin idioms such as *cum maxime* according to Harnack, so clearly was no great Latinist.

All the best,

Roger Pearse



07-25-2008, 09:40 AM

#38

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

Join Date: Oct 2005

Location: Ontario, Canada

Posts: 1,435



There are people here (like Roger and Andrew) who are much more textual experts than I am. I have a two-part question I'm hoping someone can answer.

It is my understanding that, apart from fragments, there are no extant manuscripts of Pliny's letters. And that none of those fragments include our Letter to Trajan. The earliest witness to the latter is the printed edition of the 16th century, with whatever manuscript(s) that was based on being lost.

We've discussed earlier about certain Christian writings that refer to parts of Pliny's letters, either in direct or indirect quote. We've seen that they use either "Christo et Deo" or "Christo ut Deo". But are there any ancient Christian writings that witness to the phrase in our extant Pliny: "Christo quasi deo"?

Thanks,
Earl Doherty



07-25-2008, 04:51 PM

#39

andrewcriddle

Veteran Member


Join Date: Sep 2004

Location: Birmingham UK

Posts: 4,876



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
There are people here (like Roger and Andrew) who are much more textual experts than I am. I have a two-part question I'm hoping someone can answer.

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See http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/pliny/pliny_mss.htm

Andrew Criddle



07-25-2008, 05:11 PM

#40

Roger Pearse

Veteran Member


Join Date: Apr 2002

Location: N/A

Posts: 4,370



Quote:

Originally Posted by **EarlDoherty** 
It is my understanding that, apart from fragments, there are no extant manuscripts of Pliny's letters. And that none of those fragments include our Letter to Trajan. The earliest witness to the latter is the printed edition of the 16th century, with whatever manuscript(s) that was based on being lost.

Book 10 of the letters existed in 1500 in a copy actually written before 500 AD, at a time when there were still emperors in the west. The manuscript had spent the middle ages at the great abbey of Saint Victor in France.

Ca. 1500 a scholar in Paris made a handwritten copy of book 10 which is still extant.

A few years later the famous Venetian printer Aldus Manutius obtained the Saint Victor manuscript, and printed the text from it. Unfortunately he then chopped the ancient codex up for binding materials -- hey, parchment costs money! --, as was commonplace at the time. A few leaves survive today, none from book 10. If we had any decent inventory of old books, we might find some more as endleaves.

This is a rather good textual tradition, if we think about it; our text is based on an ancient manuscript with only one copy standing in between. Most ancient texts are presumed to be contained in copies of copies of copies of an ancient codex.

Pity that Aldus wasn't more careful, tho.

All the best,

Roger Pearse



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07-26-2008, 04:45 PM

#41

EarlDoherty

Veteran Member

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



Thanks to Andrew and Roger on the Pliny manuscripts.

Earl Doherty

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