

Class 3b

NON-CHRISTIAN SOURCES FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS

Outline

- Information about the historical Jesus from four classical (Greek & Roman) authors
 - Thallos
 - Pliny the Elder
 - Suetonius
 - Tacitus
- Jewish Sources
 - Qumran & the Dead Sea Scrolls
 - Josephus
 - Rabbinic Literature

The Greek & Roman Authors

Thallos (c.55 CE?)

- What did he write? We don't know; quoted by Julius Africanus in 220 CE; that's lost too; quoted by Georgias Syncellus in his Chronicle (800 CE)
- What did he say?
- What were his sources?
- Is his testimony reliable for reconstructing the historical Jesus? Reports early Christian tradition, not something about the historical Jesus
It's third-hand, and our source is quite late

The Greek & Roman Authors

Pliny the Younger (61–120 CE)

- What did he write? *Book 10, Letter 96*
- What did he say?
- What were his sources?
- Is his testimony reliable for reconstructing the historical Jesus? *Reports early Christian tradition, not something about the historical Jesus*
Information was extracted under torture, so it's unreliable

The Greek & Roman Authors

Suetonius (70–130 CE)

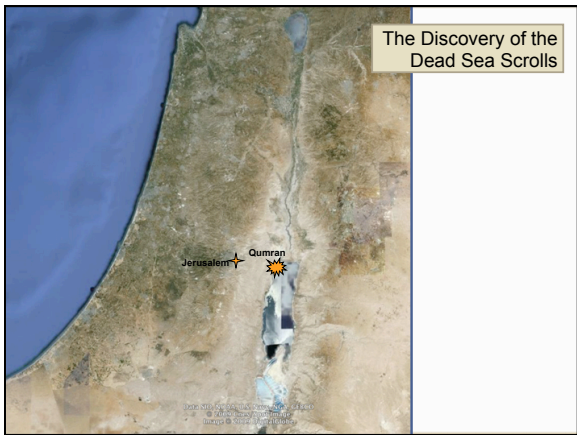
- What did he write? *Lives of the Caesars: Claudius*
- What did he say?
- What were his sources?
- Is his testimony reliable for reconstructing the historical Jesus? *He often stoops to scandals and rumor-mongering, which makes him unreliable*
Is instigator of a rebellion in Rome in 49 CE, "Chrestus," some other man of "Christ" misspelled? No Christian scribe fixes it...

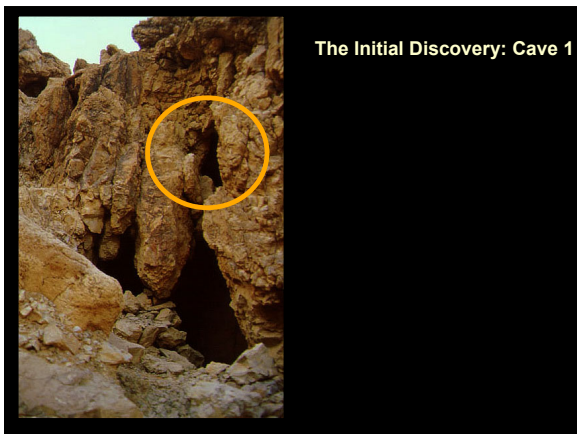
The Greek & Roman Authors

Tacitus (55/56–120 CE)

- What did he write? *Annals 15.44*
- What did he say?
- What were his sources?
- Is his testimony reliable for reconstructing the historical Jesus? *Careful use of sources (Roman archives?)*
Never stoops to scandal
Powerful writer with moralizing impulse
This (alone) is important external testimony to Jesus' death







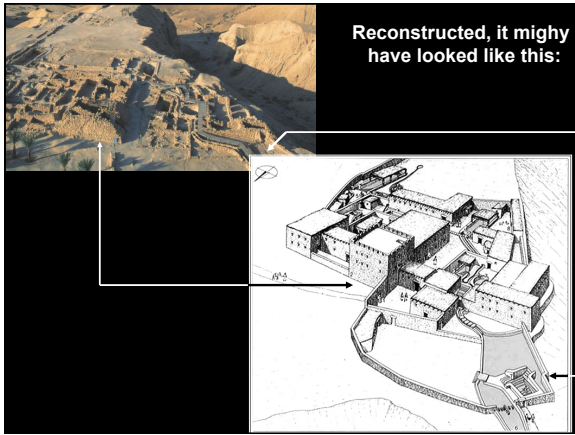


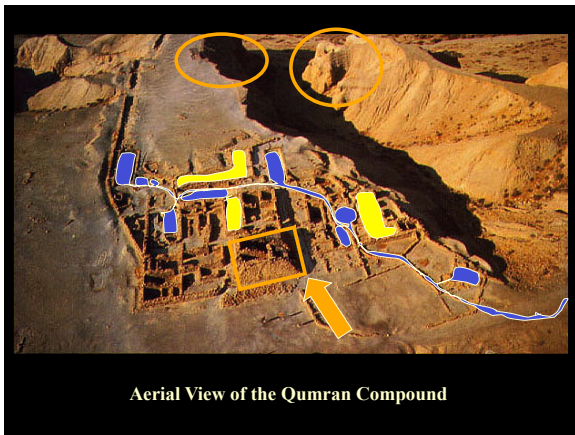
The Isaiah Scroll from Cave 1 (1QIsa^a)

Excavations at Nearby Khirbet Qumran revealed a sizeable public facility





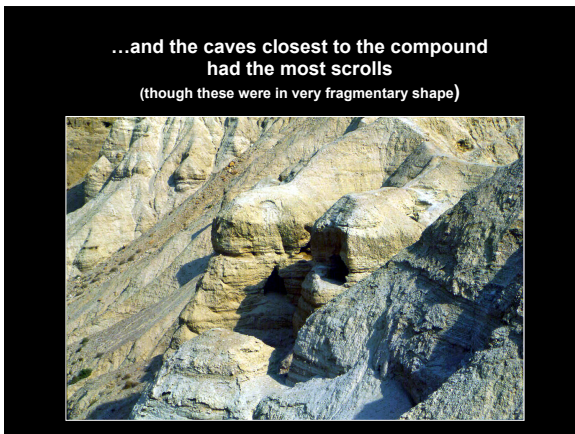








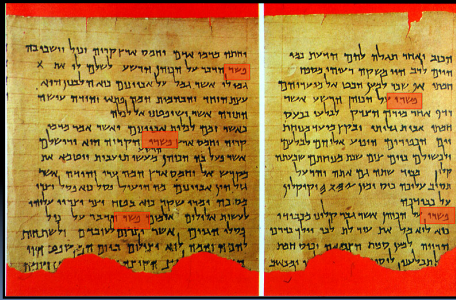




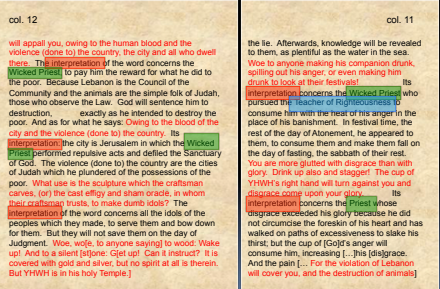
Fragments of the Gospel at Qumran?



Jesus & the Dead Sea Scrolls The "Teacher of Righteousness"



Jesus & the Dead Sea Scrolls The "Teacher of Righteousness"



Jesus & the Dead Sea Scrolls

4 Theories Tying Jesus to the “Teacher of Righteousness”

- The T of R was afflicted, put to death, and then reappeared; do we have a precursor to Jesus in this figure? (André Dupont-Sommer)
- Jesus never suffered, died or rose; these traditions were fabricated on the model of what happened to T of R (John Allegro)
- Jesus brother James, rather than Jesus, was the actual T of R
 - (4Q285: does it say, “they will kill the prince” (Robert Eisenmanna and Michael Wise) or “the prince will kill him [the wicked king]”?)
- Jesus was the Wicked Priest, and *John the Baptist* was the T of R (Barbara Thiering)

*In the end, none of these arguments is persuasive.
No positive link can be established between Jesus and the Teacher;
the teacher probably lived a century before Jesus*

The Dead Sea Scrolls

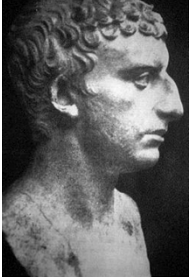
as resources for reconstructing the historical Jesus

- They do not provide direct testimony about Jesus or any other figure in the New Testament
- They do tell us a great deal about Jewish society in Jesus' time
- Essene beliefs and practices overlap somewhat with the way Christians interpreted the (shared) Jewish scriptures; both groups
 - used similar genres and forms (beatitudes, parables)
 - were associated with healing and ritual washing
 - shared communal meals and property in common
 - awaited messiahs and believed in the resurrection
 - imagined an end-time battle in the near future

JOSEPHUS

Flavius Josephus

Jewish Historian (37–100 CE)



- **Background**
 - Educated Jew
 - Rebel leader 66-68
 - Surrendered to Rome, prophesied the general's rise to emperor, rewarded with adoption into the imperial family ("Flavius")
- **Writings**
 - *The Jewish War* (75 CE)
 - *Jewish Antiquities* (94 CE)
- **Writings about Jesus**
 - *Jewish Antiquities* 20.9.1
 - *Jewish Antiquities* 18.3.3 = *Testimonium Flavianum*

Testimonium Flavianum

Jewish Antiquities 18.3.3

Around this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who did surprising deeds, and a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who in the first place came to love him did not give up their affection for him, for on the third day he appeared to them restored to life. The prophets of God had prophesied this and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, have still to this day not died out.

RABBINIC LITERATURE

Rabbinic Literature

Sources

- **Mishnah** *Tannaitic period*
 - 200 CE
 - an interpretation of Torah
- **Talmuds** *Amoraic period*
 - **Palestinian Talmud (*Yerushalmi*)**
 - c. 350 CE
 - interpretation of Torah and Mishnah*Some new tannaitic material is found in the tosefta (additions) to the Mishnah in these books*
 - **Babylonian Talmud (*Bavli*)**
 - c. 500 CE
 - A somewhat different interpretation of Torah and Mishnah

Rabbinic Literature

Traditions

- **Jesus was a magician**
 - called Ben Stada
 - brought spells from Egypt in a flesh wound
 - a deceiver, discovered in a sort of sting operation
 - his disciples perpetuated that deception and were rightly killed
- **Jesus was a bastard** *All of these traditions reflect much later debates between Jews and Christians, Not history of Jesus' life*
 - Called ben (son of) Pantera
 - Miriam is a hairdresser and unfaithful with Pantera
 - sometimes Miriam is criticized (and thus Jesus by proxy)
- **Jesus is in hell (tied to Balaam)**
- **Jesus got a fair trial**
 - The trial of Jesus wasn't rushed
 - Witnesses who'd support him were sought for 40 days; no one showed
