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Acts of Pilate

THE
ACTA PILATI.

IMPORTANT TESTIMONY OF PONTIUS PILATE,
RECENTLY DISCOVERED,

BEING HIS OFFICIAL REPORT TO THE EMPEROR TIBERIUS,
CONCERNING THE

CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST.

EDITED BY
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TO ALL
who love the Truth,
search after it,
and are willing to abide by it,
Catholic or Protestant,
within or without the Church,—
with the earnest hope that it may lead to a
deep and true devotion to Jesus,
This Contribution
to the Historical Evidence for the Divine Origin of Christianity,
is respectfully
Dedicated
by .

THE EDITOR.

"This is the religious question of the age. We rejoice in it, and thank the infidel biographers of Jesus for having urged it upon the world."

PHILIP SCHAFF, D. D.

➤✠ А С Т А ❧ Р И Л А Т И . ✠➤

The references indicated by the small letters throughout the text of the Acta, point to the NOTES, in which will be found all the principal historical and critical information necessary to its appreciative and enjoyable perusal.

PONTIUS PILATE^a to the EMPEROR TIBERIUS;^b Greeting: Recent events in my province have been of such a character, that I thought I would give the details as they have occurred, as I should not be surprised if in the course of time they may change the destiny of our nation, for it seems of late that the gods have ceased to be propitious. I am almost ready to say: Cursed be the day that I succeeded Valerius Gratus in the government of Judea. On my arrival at Jerusalem I took possession of the Pretorium and ordered a splendid feast to be prepared, to which I invited the tetrarch of Galilee, with the high Priests and his officers. At

the appointed hour no guests appeared. This was an insult offered to my dignity. A few days after, the high priest deigned to pay me a visit. His deportment was grave and deceitful. He pretended that his religion forbade him and his attendants to sit down at the table of the Romans and to offer up libations with them. I thought it expedient to accept his excuse, but from that moment I was convinced that the conquered had declared themselves the enemies of the conquerors. It seemed to me of all conquered cities, Jerusalem was the most difficult to govern. So turbulent were the people that I lived in momentary dread of an insurrection. To suppress it I had but a single centurian and a handful of soldiers. I requested a reinforcement from the Prefect of Syria, who informed me that he had scarcely troops sufficient to defend his own province. An insatiate thirst for conquest—to extend our

empire beyond the means of defending it—I fear will be the means of destroying our noble government.

Among the various rumors that came to my ears, there was one that attracted my attention in particular. A young man, it was said, had appeared in Galilee, preaching with a noble unction a new law, in the name of the gods that had sent him. At first I was apprehensive that his design was to stir up the people against the Romans, but soon were my fears dispelled. Jesus of Nazareth spake rather as a friend of the Romans than of the Jews.

One day in passing by the place of Siloe, where there was a great concourse of people, I observed in the midst of the group, a young man who was leaning against a tree, calmly addressing the multitude. I was told it was Jesus. This I could easily have suspected, so great was the difference between him and

those who were listening to him. His golden colored hair and beard gave to his appearance a celestial aspect. He appeared to be about thirty years of age. Never have I seen a sweeter or more serene countenance. What a contrast between him and his hearers, with their black beards and tawny complexion. Unwilling to interrupt him by my presence, I continued my walk; but signified to my secretary to join the group and listen. My secretary's name was Manlius. He was the grandson of the chief of the conspirators who encamped in Etruria waiting Cataline. Manlius was an ancient inhabitant of Judea, and well acquainted with the Hebrew language. He was devoted to me, and worthy of my confidence. On entering the Pretorium I found Manlius, who related to me the words Jesus had pronounced at Siloe. Never have I heard in the Pettico, nor in the works of the philosophers anything that can compare to the maxims of Jesus.

One of the rebellious Jews so numerous in Jerusalem, having asked him if it was lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, Jesus replied: "Render unto Cæsar the things which belong to Cæsar, and unto God the things that are God's." It was on account of the wisdom of this saying, that I granted so much liberty to the Nazarene, for it was in my power to have him arrested and exiled to Pontus; but this would have been contrary to the justice which has always characterized the Romans. This man was neither seditious nor rebellious. I extended to him my protection, unknown perhaps to himself. He was at liberty to act, to speak, to assemble and address the people, to choose disciples unrestrained by any Pretorian mandate. Should it ever happen—may the gods ever avert the omen—should it ever happen, I say, that the religion of our forefathers be supplanted by the religion of Jesus, it will be to

this noble toleration that Rome shall owe her premature obsequies; while I, miserable wretch, shall have been the instrument of what the Hebrews call providence, and we, destiny.

But this unlimited freedom granted to Jesus provoked the Jews; not the poor, but the rich and powerful. It is true that Jesus was severe on the latter; and this was a political reason, in my opinion, not to control the liberty of the Nazarene. "Scribes and Pharisees," he would say to them, "you are a race of vipers; you resemble painted sepulchres." At other times he would sneer at the proud alms of the publican, telling him that the mite of the poor widow was more precious in the sight of God.

New complaints were daily made at the Pretorium against the insolence of Jesus. I was even informed that some misfortune would befall him—that it would not be the

first time that Jerusalem had stoned those who called themselves prophets—and if the Pretorium refused justice an appeal^c would be made to Cæsar. However, my conduct was approved by the Senate, and I was promised a reinforcement after the termination of the Parthian war. Being too weak to suppress a sedition, I resolved upon adopting a measure that promised to establish the tranquility of the city, without subjecting the Pretorium to humiliating concession.

I wrote to Jesus, requesting an interview with him at the Pretorium. You know that in my veins flows the Spanish, mixed with the Roman blood, as incapable of fear as it is of puerile emotion. When the Nazarene made his appearance I was walking in my basilic, and my feet seemed fastened with an iron hand to the marble pavement, and I trembled in every limb as a guilty culprit, though he was calm—the Nazarene, calm as

innocence. When he came up to me he stopped, and by a signal sign he seemed to say to me, "I am here." For some time, I contemplated with admiration and awe this extraordinary type of man—a type of man unknown to our numerous painters, who have given form and figure to all the gods and heroes.

"Jesus," I said to him at last—and my tongue faltered—"Jesus of Nazareth, I have granted you for the last three years ample freedom of speech, nor do I regret it. Your words are those of a sage. I know not whether you have read Socrates or Plato, but this I know, that there is in your discourses a majestic simplicity that elevates you far above these philosophers. The Emperor is informed of it, and I, his humble representative in this country, am glad of having allowed you that liberty of which you are so worthy. However, I

must not conceal from you that your discourses have raised up against you powerful and inveterate enemies. Neither is this surprising. Socrates had his enemies, and he fell a victim of their hatred. Yours are doubly incensed against you, on account of your sayings against them, and on account of the liberty extended towards you. They even accused me of being indirectly leagued with you, for the purpose of depriving the Hebrews of the little civil power which Rome has left them.^d My request—I do not say my order—is, that you be more circumspect in the future, and more tender in arousing the pride of your enemies, lest they raise against you the stupid populace, and compel me to employ the instruments of justice.

The Nazarene calmly replied: “Prince of the earth, your words proceed not from true wisdom.^e Say to the torrent, stop in the midst of the mountain home, because it

will uproot the trees of the valley. The torrent will answer you, that it must obey the laws of the Creator. God alone knows whither flows the torrent. Verily, I say unto you, before the Rose of Sharon blossoms, the blood of the just shall be spilt."

"Your blood shall not be spilt," replied I with emotion. "You are more precious, in my estimation, on account of your wisdom, than all the turbulent and proud Pharisees, who abuse the freedom granted them by the Romans, conspire against Cæsar, and construe our bounty into fear. Insolent wretches, they are not aware that the wolf of the Tiber sometimes clothes himself with the skin of the sheep. I will protect you against them. My Pretorium is open to you as an asylum; it is a sacred asylum."

Jesus carelessly shook his head, and said, with a grace and a divine smile, "When the day shall have come, there will be no asylum

for the Son of Man, neither in the earth nor under the earth. The asylum of the Just is there, pointing to the heavens. That which is written in the books of the prophets must be accomplished.

“Young man,” answered I, mildly, “you oblige me to convert my request into an order. The safety of the province, which has been confided to my care, requires it. You must observe more moderation in your discourses. Do not infringe. My orders you know. May happiness attend you. Farewell.”

“Prince of the earth,” replied Jesus, “I come not to bring war into the world, but peace, love and charity. I was born on the same day on which Augustus Cæsar gave peace to the Roman world. Persecution proceeds not from me. I expect it from others, and will meet it in obedience to the will of my Father, who has shown me the

way. Restrain therefore, your worldly prudence. It is not in your power to arrest the victim at the foot of the Tabernacle of expiation."

So saying, he disappeared like a bright shadow behind the curtains of the basilic. To Herod, who then reigned in Galilee, the enemies of Jesus addressed themselves, to wreak their vengeance on the Nazarene. Had Herod consulted his own inclination, he would have ordered Jesus immediately to be put to death; but, though proud of his royal dignity, yet he was afraid of committing an act that might diminish his influence with the Senate. Herod called on me one day at the Pretorium, and on rising to take leave, after some insignificant conversation, he asked me what was my opinion concerning the Nazarene. I replied that Jesus appeared to be one of those great philosophers that great nations sometimes produce, that his

doctrines are by no means sacrilegious, and that the intention of Rome was to leave him to that freedom of speech which was justified by his actions. Herod smiled maliciously, and saluting me with an ironical respect, he departed.

The great feast of the Jews was approaching, and the intention was to avail themselves of the popular exultation which always manifests itself at the solemnities of a pass-over. The city was overflowing with a tumultuous populace clamoring for the death of the Nazarene. My emissaries informed me that the treasure of the Temple had been employed in bribing the people. The danger was pressing. A Roman centurion had been insulted. I wrote to the prefect of Syria for a hundred foot soldiers, and as many cavalry. He declined. I saw myself alone, with a handful of veterans, in the midst of a rebellious city, too weak to suppress a

disorder, and having no other choice left but to tolerate it. They had seized upon Jesus; and the seditious rabble, although they had nothing to fear from the Pretorium, believing with their leaders that I winked at their sedition, continued vociferating, "Crucify him! crucify him!" Three powerful parties had combined together at that time against Jesus. First, the Herodians and the Sadducees, whose seditious conduct seemed to have proceeded from double motives. They hated the Nazarene, and were impatient of the Roman yoke. They could never forgive me for having entered the holy city with banners that bore the image of the Roman Emperor, and, although in this instance I had committed a fatal error, yet the sacrilege did not appear less heinous in their eyes. Another grievance, also, rankled in their bosoms. I had proposed to employ a part of the treasure of the Temple in erecting

edifices of public utility. My proposal was scowled at. The Pharisees were the avowed enemies of Jesus. They cared not for the government. They bore with bitterness the severe reprimands which the Nazarene for three years had been continually throwing out against them wherever he went. Too weak and pusillanimous to act by themselves, they had embraced the quarrels of the Herodians and the Sadducees. Besides these three parties, I had to contend against the reckless and profligate populace, always ready to join a sedition, and to profit by the disorder and confusion that resulted therefrom.

Jesus was dragged before the high priest and condemned to death. It was then that the high priest, Caiaphas, performed a derisory act of submission. He sent his prisoner to me to pronounce his condemnation, and secure his execution.^f I answered him, that

as Jesus was a Galilean, the affair came in Herod's jurisdiction, and ordered him to be sent hither. The wily tetrarch professed humility, and protesting his preference to the Lieutenant of Cæsar, he committed the fate of the man to my hands. Soon my palace assumed the aspect of a besieged citadel. Every moment increased the number of the seditionists. Jerusalem was inundated with crowds from the mountains of Nazareth. All Judea appeared to be pouring into the devoted city. I had taken a wife^g—a girl from among the Gauls—who professed to see into futurity—weeping and throwing herself at my feet—"Beware," said she to me, "beware, and touch not that man, for he is holy. Last night I saw him in a vision. He was walking on the waters. He was flying on the wings of the winds. He spoke to the tempest, and to the fishes of the lake—all were obedient to him. Behold!

the torrent in Mount Kedron flows with blood, the statues of Cæsar are filled with Gemoniæ,^h the columns of the Interium have given away, and the sun is veiled in mourning, like a vestal in the tomb. O Pilate! evil awaits thee if thou wilt not listen to the vows of thy wife. Dread the curse of a Roman Senate, dread the powers of Cæsar."

By this time the marble stairs groaned under the weight of the multitude. The Nazarene was brought back to me. I proceeded to the hall of justice, followed by my guard, and asked the people, in a severe tone, what they demanded. "The death of the Nazarene," was the reply. "For what crime?" "He has blasphemed. He has prophesied the ruin of the Temple. He calls himself the Son of God, the Messiah, the King of the Jews." "Roman justice," said I, "punishes not such offenses with death." "Crucify him, crucify him!" belched forth

the relentless rabble. The vociferations of the infuriated mob shook the palace to its foundations. There was but one who appeared to be calm in the midst of the vast multitude. It was the Nazarene. After many fruitless attempts to protect him from this fury of his merciless persecutors, I adopted a measure which, at the moment, appeared to me to be the only one that could save his life. I ordered him to be scourged, then calling for an ewer, I washed my handsⁱ in the presence of the multitude, thereby signifying to them my disapproval of the deed. But in vain. It was his life that these wretches thirsted for. Often in our civil commotions have I witnessed the furious animosity of the multitude, but nothing could be compared to what I witnessed in the present instance. It might have been truly said, that on this occasion all the phantoms of the infernal regions had assembled at Jerusalem.

The crowd appeared not to walk; they were borne off, and whirled as a vortex, rolling along like living waves, from the portals of the Pretorium even unto Mount Zion, with howlings, screams, shrieks, and vociferations, such as were never heard in the seditions of the Panonia, or in the tumult of the forum.

By degrees the day darkened like a winter's twilight, such as had been at the death of the great Julius Cæsar. It was likewise towards the ides of March.

I, the continued governor of a rebellious province, was leaning against a column of my basilic, contemplating athwart the dreary gloom of these fiends of tartars dragging to execution the innocent Nazarene. All around me was deserted. Jerusalem had vomited forth her indwellers through the funeral gate that leads to the Gemonica. An air of desolation and sadness enveloped me. My guards had joined the cavalry, and the

centurion, to display a shadow of power, was endeavoring to keep order. I was left alone, and my breaking heart admonished me that what was passing at that moment appertained rather to the history of the gods than that of man. A loud clamor was heard proceeding from Golgotha, which, borne on the winds, seemed to announce an agony such as had never been heard by mortal ears. Dark clouds lowered over the pinnacle of the temple, and, settling over the city, covered it with a veil. So dreadful were the signs that were seen, both in the heavens and on the earth, that Dionysius, the Areopagite,^k is reported to have exclaimed, "Either the author of nature is suffering, or the universe is falling apart."

Towards the first hour of the night,^l I threw my mantle around me and went down into the city, toward the gates of Golgotha. The sacrifice was consummated. The crowd was

returning home; still agitated, it is true; but gloomy, taciturn and desperate. What they had witnessed had stricken them with terror and remorse. I also saw my little Roman cohort pass by mournfully, the standard-bearer having veiled his eagle in token of grief, and I overheard some of the soldiers murmuring strange words, which I did not understand. Others were recounting prodigies almost similar to those which had so often smitten the Romans by the will of the gods. Sometimes groups of men and women would halt, then looking backward towards Golgotha, would remain motionless, in expectation of witnessing some new prodigy.

I returned to the Pretorium, sad and pensive. On ascending the stairs—the steps of which were still stained with the blood of the Nazarene—I perceived an old man in a suppliant posture, and behind him several women in tears. He threw himself at my feet and

wept bitterly. It is painful to see an old man weep.

“Father,” said I to him mildly, “who are you and what is your request?”

“I am Joseph of Arimathea,” replied he, “and am come to beg of you, upon my knees, the permission to bury Jesus of Nazareth.”

“Your prayer is granted,” said I to him, and at the same time ordered Manlius to take some soldiers with him to superintend the interment, lest it should be profaned.

A few days after, the sepulchre was found empty. His disciples published all over the country that Jesus had risen from the dead, as he had foretold. A last duty remained for me to perform, and that was to communicate to you these deplorable events. I did it on the same night that followed the fatal catastrophe, and had just finished the communication when day began to dawn. At that moment the sound of clarions playing

the air of Diana, struck my ear. Casting my eye towards the Cæsarean gate I beheld a troop of soldiers, and heard at a distance other trumpets sounding Cæsar's march. It was the reinforcement that had been promised me. Two thousand chosen troops who, to hasten their arrival, had marched all night. "It has been decreed by the fates," cried I, wringing my hands, "that the great iniquity should be accomplished; that for the purpose of averting the deeds of yesterday, troops should arrive to-day! Cruel destiny, how thou sportest with the affairs of mortals!" It was but too true, what the Nazarene exclaimed while writhing on the cross: "All is consummated."

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