

David W Chapman and Eckhard J Schnabel, *The Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus. Texts and Commentary, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 344*, (Mohr Siebeck, 2015), xxiv + 867 pp, ISBN 9783161516740.

Commented [WA1]: Please confirm:
(a) If the book is hard back or soft back
(b) The price of the book, preferably in Euros or Dollars

Surprisingly little is known with certainty about one of the watershed moments in global history: the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. The facts are scarce, the historical narratives diverse and the scientific literature abundant. The book under review makes a valuable contribution to the academic debate on the passion of Christ by presenting theological, literary and juridical texts from ancient Rome, Egypt and Jewish communities that clarify the historical setting of the New Testament account of Jesus's trial and crucifixion. This broadening of perspective is very much needed, indeed, since the sources that contain explicit references to the trial and crucifixion of Jesus are rare. Apart from the four canonical Gospel stories, which sometimes contradict themselves, there are the apocryphal Gospel of Peter and four non-Christian sources, including Flavius Josephus's (c. 37-100) *Antiquitates Judaicae* from the 80s or 90s, Tacitus's (ca. 56-117) *Annales* from 110-120, a passage from the Talmud (Sanh. 43a) dating back to the period between the ~~3rd~~ third and ~~fifth~~ 5th century and a letter of Mara bar Serapion, a Syrian prisoner, to his son from 73. Flavius Josephus not only mentions the execution of Jesus, but also claims that he had a brother, Jacob, who is also mentioned by the non-canonical Gospel of Peter and who was allegedly stoned to death in 62.

Contrary to the Gospel stories and the references in Flavius Josephus and Tacitus, the account of Jesus's execution in the Talmud does not mention a trial before the Roman authorities. It is highly unlikely, though, that Jesus was not subject to a Roman trial, for even if he had been condemned by the Sanhedrin, the standard capital punishment imposed by Jewish authorities was stoning, not crucifixion. It even remains unclear whether a fully-fledged trial before Jewish authorities took place before Jesus was tried by Pontius Pilate. In its first part, the book under review collects all relevant historical texts that can help to clarify the Gospel stories that hint at a Jewish trial before the Sanhedrin. It contains mainly Jewish sources that explain the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin in Jesus's time, the treatment of capital cases in Jewish law, the manner in which witnesses were interrogated, the scope of the charge of blasphemy, and the transfer of court cases. These texts cast doubt over Mark's account of the interrogation of Jesus during the night by Jewish authorities, since this would not have been according to the normal procedure. The legal ground by virtue of which Jesus could have been accused before the Sanhedrin also remains doubtful.

Vague, too, remains the nature of the relationship between the events happening before the Jewish authorities, on the one hand, and the Roman trial, on the other. Some scholars, including Franz Wieacker,¹ have suggested that Pontius Pilate temporarily abandoned the case to Caiaphas, the high priest and president of the Sanhedrin, because of the religious nature of the case. However, historical evidence suggests that it was much more common for the Sanhedrin to refer a case to the Roman authorities than the opposite way around. This is illustrated by a text from Flavius Josephus's *Bellum Judaicum* discussing a case similar to that of Jesus (149-151). A poor peasant from Galilee named Jesus ben Ananias had been delivered by the Jewish authorities to Albinus, the Roman governor of Judea between 62 and 64, precisely on the grounds that he predicted the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem. Contrary to Christ, he was tortured but not sentenced to death, because he did not have any followers and therefore did not constitute a threat to public order. The second part of the book

¹ Franz Wieacker, *Römische Rechtsgeschichte. Zweiter Abschnitt: Die Jurisprudenz vom frühen Prinzipat bis zum Ausgang der Antike* (ed. Joseph Georg Wolff), (München, Beck, 2006), p. 366, n. 60.

under review has collected many relevant texts of this kind, mainly from Roman literary sources, that put the Roman trial before Pilate into perspective.

The merit of this work is that it offers a comprehensive anthology of texts from different cultural backgrounds that shed light on the context in which the trial and crucifixion of Jesus must have taken place. It does not ~~not~~ so much offer a new interpretation of the historical events that inspired the Gospel stories about the end of Jesus's life as serve as a precious tool of research that will enable individual scholars to form their own opinion. For legal historians, in particular, it is a welcome addition to the seminal work on the subject by Alan Watson, Francesco Amarelli and Massimo Miglietta, amongst other eminent scholars.² Few certainties should be expected, though. The only historical fact beyond doubt about the very origins of Christianity is that a man named Jeshua (Jesus) was crucified when Pontius Pilate was a prefect in Judea—the typically Roman character of that sanction is highlighted by a plethora of texts in the third part of the book under review. It is this fact of a crucified Jesus, the Christ, which formed the basis of the apostle Paul's missionary work in the 40s and 50s (1 Cor 2:2). It proved decisive for the development of Western legal culture.

Wim Decock

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Leuven

Associate Researcher, Max-Planck-Institute for European Legal History, Frankfurt am Main

² Alan Watson, *The Trial of Jesus*, (Athens Ga., University of Georgia Press, 1995); Francesco Amarelli and Francesco Lucrezi (eds), *Il processo contro Gesù*, (Napoli, Jovene, 1999); Massimo Miglietta, *I.N.R.I. Studi e riflessioni intorno al processo a Gesù*, (Napoli, Satura, 2011).