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# Narrative Anomaly in Josephus: *Jewish Antiquities* xviii:63<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Josephus in the *Jewish Antiquities* introduces Jesus the Messiah into his history of the Jews, and appears to report events corresponding closely to those of the Gospels, including Jesus's crucifixion on the orders of Pontius Pilate. A long standing dispute exists about the authenticity of this text. The present article offers a narratological analysis of the passage, comparing the styles of event reporting in the passage with the three other episodes in Josephus's Pontius Pilate sequence. The study concludes that the uses of the Greek verb forms such as aorists and participles are distinct in the Jesus passage from those in the other Pilate episodes, and that these differences amount to a difference in genre. It is suggested that the Jesus passage is close in style and content to the creeds that were composed two to three centuries after Josephus.

## 1 Introduction

Texts may be disputed for a number of reasons. Usually, some initial premise of implausibility prompts researchers to question the text's genuineness, a more sceptical age having come to view the credulity of earlier generations as a sign of gullibility. Once suspicion has set in, serious study may uncover the fault lines that eventually cause the text to be generally regarded as spurious. If the external circumstances surrounding a text's provenance are known, as is the case with more recently discovered artifacts, authenticity may not hold up under the scrutiny of newer historical methods. The close study of an inscribed artifact, for example, may involve epigraphical, microscopic, and chemical analysis and a precise tracking of sources that are bound to disclose fakery. The so-called James Ossuary, which caused a brief flutter of interest a few years ago with the claim that the ossuary (a funeral repository of bones) contained an inscription linking it to a James, the supposed brother of Jesus, was quickly disposed of by experts.<sup>2</sup> Written documents that have been in existence for long periods cannot be subjected to a material

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1 I am happy to acknowledge support in the writing of this article for an External Fellowship at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies.

2 The ossuary was endorsed as authentic by Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington (2003). The release of Shanks and Witherington's book coincided almost exactly with the publication of decisive linguistic, chemical, epigraphical and circumstantial evidence that the artifact is a fake.

analysis. However, once suspicion is cast on them, they may betray linguistic blemishes such as anachronistic vocabulary and grammar; Lorenzo Valla's exposure in 1440 of the ninth century forgery known as the Donation of Constantine, a purported fourth century testament that ceded vast territories in and around Italy to the medieval popes, was of this nature (Waswo 1987).

If the cultural investment in the authenticity of the text is very great, then, the movement from unquestioned validity to disputed text may take many centuries and external and material evidence will necessarily be unobtainable. Thus it is with a passage in Josephus Flavius's historical writings attesting to the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, whose authenticity was only questioned seventeen centuries after its alleged production.<sup>3</sup> In this essay I will consider this disputed text from a narratological point of view. The passage occurs in Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*, a historical work written in Greek and dated 93 CE.

## 2 The *Testimonium Flavianum*

The text is embedded in a series of historical episodes concerning the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate in Palestine. It is commonly known as the "Flavian Testimony" (*Testimonium Flavianum*), Flavius being Josephus's Roman name after his adoption into the Flavian clan. If it were authentically the work of Josephus, it would have massive historical importance, since it would be the only known pagan witness to the life of Jesus to have survived from the first century of the Common Era (CE). The other first century accounts of Jesus are from Christian sources (the letters of Paul and perhaps one or more of the Gospels); they are not for this reason alone to be discounted, but being interwoven with an array of scarcely credible events, they do not testify unambiguously to the historicity of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> My aim here is to point out some incompatibilities between the language

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<sup>3</sup> Josephus (Joseph ben Matthias, Josephus Flavius) was born in 37 CE in Jerusalem, and died in Rome ca. 100 CE. He claimed in his autobiography to have been born of a noble Jewish family, and was educated in Greek. He also claimed to have been a Pharisaic priest. Caught up in the war of 66–70 CE, he led a Jewish army in the siege of Jotapata in 68 CE. He abandoned his army and surrendered to Titus and Vespasian under humiliating conditions. He was adopted by Vespasian, assumed Vespasian's gentilian name, Flavius, and settled in Rome with a generous pension that allowed him to write, in Greek (a language of educated discourse in Imperial Rome), his two greatest historical works, *Jewish War* in 76 CE, and a more general account of the Jewish people and their history, the *Jewish Antiquities*, in 93 CE.

<sup>4</sup> Mack (1995:10) sums up the sceptical position: "Are we to think that all of it is historical: portents, miracles, resurrections, cosmic journeys, apocalyptic visions, angels, a crucified god, divine "breakthroughs", and metaphysical transformations? Are we to make an exception for that

of the *Testimonium Flavianum* and that of the other three episodes in the Pilate sequence that suggest they are not by the same author.

The *Testimonium* itself is, when compared to the surrounding episodes, unusually short. Its very brevity is a suspicious feature, one that has led some defenders of its authenticity to suggest that while parts of the text are genuinely Josephan, the text has been tampered with by later Christians wanting to erase scandalous content. There have been many attempts to restore the putative original, all of them speculative. However, even the concession that there have been alterations is self-serving, since any mention of Jesus, no matter how detrimental, would preserve the basic fact of Josephus's witness. In fact, however, the syntax of the *Testimonium* does not display the kinds of discontinuities we might expect to find if substantial changes such as major deletions or insertions had been made. The sentences are well formed, the use of particles such as *gar* and *de* is appropriate, the Greek constructions are correct and complete. In short, the passage is linguistically and conceptually integrated, and the assumption of an originally longer text that has been substantially shortened or of a shorter text that has been lengthened does not appear to be warranted on purely internal linguistic grounds.

The text reads as follows:<sup>5</sup>

(1)

Ginetai de kata touton ton khronon Iēsous, sophos anēr, ei ge andra auton  
*There-lives now at this-same the time Jesus, a-wise man if indeed a-man him*

legein khrē. Ēn gar paradoksōn ergōn poiētēs didaskalos anthrōpōn  
*to-call is-appropriate. he-was:ipf for of-wondrous deeds doer teacher of-men*

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chapter of human history, a record of events held to be true even though fantastic according to normal criteria for making judgments?" Price (2000, 2003) and Doherty (2005) give accounts, from a sceptical perspective, of the differing past and present views about the historicity of Jesus.

5 The interlinear glosses and the English translations are my own. The usual transcriptional conventions are used here: the aspirates χ θ φ are written *kh*, *th*, *ph*; the affricates ξ, ψ are represented by the digraphs *ks*, *ps*. The long vowels η, ω are written as ē, ō. Smooth breathing is omitted, as are accents and the iota subscript. The text is presented in the trilinear convention in general use by discourse analysts: the top line is the Greek text, and the second line a literal word by word translation; the text is followed by a free rendering of the meaning. Hyphens in the second line indicate meanings encoded in the same word. In the identification of verb forms as imperfect and aorist, which is not always a simple matter, I have followed the "Greek Word Study Tool" in the Tufts University classical website *Perseus Digital Library*. Abbreviations include: aor (aorist), ipf (imperfect), gen (genitive), acc (accusative), prt (participle), fut (future), 3s (third person singular), 3p (third person plural).

tōn hedonē t'alēthē dekhomenōn kai pollous men loudaious pollous de  
*of-those with-pleasure and truth receiving, and many both Jews many also*

kai tou Hellēnikou epēgageto. Ho Khristos outos ēn. Kai auton endeiksē  
*and the Gentiles caused-to-follow:aor. The Messiah he was. And him at-the-indictment*

tōn prōtōn andrōn par' hēmin staurō epitimēkotos Pilatou, ouk  
*of-the first men among us to-the-cross having-sentenced Pilate not*

epausanto hoi to prōton auton agapēsantes: ephanē gar autois tritēn  
*ceased:aor they at first him loving: he-appeared:aor for to-them third*

ekhōn hēmeran palin zōn, tōn theiōn prophetōn tauta te kai alla  
*having day again living by-the divine prophets such things and other*

muria thaumasia peri autou eirēkotōn. Eiseti te nun tōn  
*myriads miracles concerning him foretelling. right-up-to and now of-the*

Khristianōn apo toude ōnomasmenōn ouk epelipe to phulon.  
*Christians after him being-named not has-ceased:aor the tribe*

At this same time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if it is appropriate to call him a man. For he was a performer of miraculous deeds and a teacher of such men as take pleasure in truth, and he was followed by many Jews and also by many Gentiles. He was the Messiah. And when on the indictment of the leading men among us Pilate sentenced him to the cross, those who had loved him before did not cease: for he appeared to them restored to life on the third day, the divine prophets having foretold such things and many other thousands of miracles concerning him. And even up to the present day the tribe of Christians named after him has not ceased to exist. (*Jewish Antiquities* 18:63; Feldman 1965: 49–50)

Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century the authenticity of the passage has repeatedly been questioned. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Voltaire (1764) knew of the doubts about its genuineness, and noted with glee that an apparent mainstay of the historicity of Jesus, and by implication of Christianity, had been pulled away. Its defenders have pointed out that it is found in all the known manuscripts and that certain elements of the style and wording are characteristic of Josephus. Against these points it is argued that all the known manuscripts appear to come from a fairly late single stem manuscript and that the allegedly Josephan style and wording are not unique and are in any case not difficult to imitate. Moreover, despite its evident importance to debates and discussions of Jesus in the first centuries CE, early Christian and pagan writers are reticent about the passage, even in contexts where it would have been decidedly advantageous to them to mention it. Feldman notes in his article on Josephus in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*:

The passage appears in all our manuscripts; but a considerable number of Christian writers – Pseudo-Justin and Theophilus in the second century, Minucius Felix, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Julius Africanus, Tertullian, Hippolytus and Origen in the third century, and Methodius and Pseudo-Eustathius in the early fourth century, who knew Josephus and cited from his works, do not refer to this passage, though one would imagine that it would be the first passage that a Christian apologist would cite. In particular, Origen (*Contra Celsum* 1.47 and *Commentary on Matthew* 10.17), who certainly knew Book 18 of the *Antiquities* and cites five passages from it, explicitly states that Josephus did not believe in Jesus as Christ. The first to cite the *Testimonium* is Eusebius (c. 324); and even after him, we may note, there are eleven Christian writers who cite Josephus but not the *Testimonium*. In fact, it is not until Jerome in the early fifth century that we have another reference to it. (Feldman 1999: 911–12)<sup>6</sup>

There is, then, reason to suspect that the Jesus episode is a later insertion, dating from more than two hundred years after Josephus's death, and probably absent from most manuscripts of the *Jewish Antiquities* until even later. Its status is at least ambiguous, with Christian commentators tending strongly (but not universally) to support its authenticity and religious sceptics seeing it as fraudulent.<sup>7</sup>

### 3 Narrative and Verbal Syntax

In this essay I will be considering linguistic (morphological and syntactic) aspects of the section of the *Jewish Antiquities* that reports the activities of Pontius Pilate. The study of narrative language has in recent decades been clarified by the cross-linguistic comparison of story-telling techniques, which has enabled narrative structure in individual cultures to be studied in the context of both the grammar of specific languages and general human linguistic behavior (Hopper 1978, 1979; Grimes 1975). Story-telling does not proceed at a uniform pace, but rather the fast-moving main events of the story are interspersed and surrounded by slower descriptive episodes and commentary that augment but do not report the main events. Languages have a variety of strategies for signaling and sustaining this distinction, which has come to be known as *foregrounding* and *backgrounding* (Hopper 1979). The strategies for expressing this distinction

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<sup>6</sup> Feldman's earlier, often cited, opinion in the 1965 Loeb Classical Library edition of Josephus had been: "The most probable view seems to be that our text represents substantially what Josephus wrote, but that some alterations have been made by a Christian interpolator" (49). His later (1999) statement appears to supersede this comment and to introduce a much more sceptical view of the *Testimonium*.

<sup>7</sup> Feldman (1965: 49) gives a summary of some of the arguments both for and against authenticity. A more recent full discussion is found in Doherty (2005).

include not only verbal inflections, but also discourse particles, word order and focus devices (Weinrich 1964, Hopper 1979). In a number of languages, the verb system is partitioned into morphological aspects known generally as *perfective* and *imperfective* which correspond in function roughly to foregrounding and backgrounding respectively. This correlation is firmer for the pair perfective verb: foregrounding than for imperfective verb: backgrounding because backgrounding is a more diffuse function that may include a wider range of verbal paradigms such as irrealis forms, infinitives, medio-passives, pluperfects, future perfects and other arrangements of tense, voice and modality. Imperfective forms are therefore more governed by language-specific norms of story-telling, and of course by the morphological and syntactic means available to each language. What Reid (1977) has shown for French has a wider validity: the prominent events of a narrative discourse are strongly associated not only with the perfective forms of the verb, but also in turn with features that typically accompany main-line events:

- a) Perfective constructions are associated with individual participants in the narrative, rather than inanimate things or groups.
- b) In particular, the main character of the story will typically appear in conjunction with the perfective construction.
- c) Main-line events rarely appear as negative, since main-line events report things that happened rather than unreal nonhappenings.

To these may be added the fact that perfective verb forms report single events that are sequenced such that there is no temporal overlap, but rather each such event presupposes the completion of the previous one, a fact that has important consequences for such things as word order and the distribution of focus in the sentence (Hopper 1978 ).

The specifically Greek construction of the foreground/background distinction is made through the verb, in which there are two major systems known as *imperfect* and *aoist*. These two systems are articulated in various tenses, modalities, infinitives and participles. The two verbal paradigms correspond to what is known more generally as perfective aspect and imperfective aspect. Broadly, these are two parallel verb systems, which are sometimes related through simple suffixes but are sometimes suppletive. They are distributed in discourse in the manner just described: finite aorist, that is, perfective, sentences typically report an event as closed and in a sequence with other events. Imperfect, that is, imperfective, sentences describe antecedent, static situations or distributed actions that help us understand the motives and other circumstances of the aorist sentences. Although I have presented the distribution of verb forms in discourse as a dichotomous one of foreground/background, it is likely that we should make

more distinctions. Diver (1969:48) identifies four levels of what he calls the “system of relevance” of the Homeric verb:

- 1) More Central (or Most Relevant): aorist active
- 2) Less Central (or More Relevant): aorist middle
- 3) Less Peripheral (or Less Relevant): imperfect active
- 4) More Peripheral (or Least Relevant): imperfect middle



These levels are perhaps identifiable in very long texts such as the Homeric epics, with which Diver is concerned, but are harder to discern in shorter texts. For this reason, Diver’s 1 and 2 (aorists) are here grouped together functionally, and likewise his 3 and 4 (imperfects).

In connected discourse in Greek we typically find that finite aorist forms are used to report the principal events associated with the central protagonists. The following example is taken from Thucydides (II:15), cited by Goodwin (1893:16; my translation). The aorist verbs are here presented in bold face, the imperfect verbs in italics:

(2)

Epi Kekropos hē Attikē kata poleis *ōkeito*, kai ou *ksunēesan* bouleusomenoi, all’ autoi ekastoi *epoliteuonto* kai *ebouleuonto*. Epeidē de Thēseus **ebasileusen**, es tēn nun polin ousan **ksunōkise** pantas.

At the time of Kekropia [earlier name for Athens], the Attic people *dwelt* in their own towns, and did not *come together* for council meetings, but instead each group *had their own community* and *held their own meetings*. But when Theseus **became king**, he **caused them all to live together** in a single city.

The imperfects *ōkeito*, *ksunēesan*, *epoliteuonto* and *ebouleuonto* set the stage for the two important events, the ascension of Theseus and the uniting of the Attic clans into a single urban population, narrated with the aorists *ebasileusen* and *ksunōkise*. The characterization of the two event types includes the following:

- i) The imperfect events are multiple, diffuse and repeated. The aorist events are reported as single and completed.
- ii) The aorist events are arranged in non-overlapping sequence, with one event following another. The imperfect events are not reported as being in sequence with one another, but are scattered over different times.
- iii) The imperfect events refer to unnamed and unnumbered groups. The aorist events report the actions of a single significant personage (King Theseus), typically the main protagonist or protagonists of the story.
- iv) The imperfect events occurred at indefinite times in the past, and even include negated situations, things that did not happen. The aorist reports

events that occurred within a relatively short and circumscribed time period, and is rarely associated with negation.

- v) The aorist events carry forward the skeletal plot of the story. The imperfects supply ancillary material that helps us understand the story, but does not report the indispensable events. Aorists are used sparingly, somewhat like pivots around which the narrative swings. They can often be seen to form the nucleus of an event cluster consisting of finite (aorist and imperfect) and nonfinite verbs (infinitives, participles, and nominalizations).

The Theseus segment, the imperfects set the stage for the happenings. They describe and motivate the antecedent events and situations to which the acts of King Theseus, the aorist events, are responses. Imperfects narrate background, aorists narrate foreground. In this quite simple example, the verb forms are all finite (with the one exception of the future middle participle *bouleusomenoi* ["with the intention of holding counsel"] are either aorist or imperfect. In longer lively narration, more complex patterns appear, as will be discussed below.

#### 4 The Pontius Pilate Sequence

Pontius Pilate is first named in the *Jewish Antiquities* in section 18:35, where he is briefly identified as the successor to Valerius Gratus as procurator<sup>8</sup> of Judaea. After this initial mention, Josephus refers to him only by his cognomen Pilate (Greek *Pilātos*). The narrative sections in the *Antiquities* involving Pontius Pilate begin in Book 18:55; the last mention of him is in 18:89, the point at which he was ignominiously dismissed and sent back to Rome by Vitellius, the governor of Syria, his superior. His actions as procurator are narrated in four episodes, one of which is the disputed *Testimonium Flavianum*. The episodes concerning Pilate are as follows:

- i) The first Pilate episode tells of Pilate's decision at the beginning of his tenure to bring the military standards, the *signa* of the legions, into the inner temple. The *signa* had at this time become emblems of a Roman military cult of the god-emperor, and so carried icons of the Emperor. Their presence in the city was sacrilege, and provoked a serious riot by the Jews. When Pilate ordered the rioters to disperse, they defied him by lying down and baring their throats to his soldiers. Pilate was forced to back down and remove the standards from Jerusalem.

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<sup>8</sup> Pilate's actual title according to an inscription discovered in 1961 may have been Prefect rather than Procurator (see "Pilate Stone", *Wikipedia* (revised 30 November 2010)).

- ii) Josephus next tells how Pilate raided the temple treasury for funds for an aquifer into Jerusalem. When the enraged Jews protested in the streets of Caesarea, instead of lining the soldiers up in companies and risking another confrontation, he ordered them to dress in Jewish clothing and infiltrate the rioters armed with cudgels, and these soldiers in disguise broke up the demonstration and clubbed to death a number of Jews. The passage ends: *kai outō pauetai hē stasis* (“and thus ended the uprising”).
- iii) The story of Jesus the Messiah follows immediately. Jesus, a wise and gifted man, gained a following among both Jews and Gentiles. At the instigation of the Jewish leaders Pilate sentenced him to be crucified. He rose again after the third day as predicted by the prophets. The Christian tribe continued to exist to that very day.
- iv) The sequence of Pontius Pilate narratives ends in Palestine with the Revolt of the Samaritans. It was not much more than a religious procession, but Pilate suppressed it with such violence that the governor of Syria, Vitellius, was troubled, and he fired Pilate and sent him back to Rome to answer to the Emperor. But while Pilate was on his way to Rome, Tiberius died, and at this point Pontius Pilate disappears from Josephus’s story.

Interspersed with the Pilate episodes and immediately following the Jesus episode are two unrelated stories in which Pilate is not mentioned. Both are set in Rome. One is a novella about a young noblewoman named Paulina, a worshipper of Isis, who is seduced by a would-be lover through trickery. When the deception is uncovered the lover is exiled and his co-conspirators crucified. The other concerns Fulvia, a wealthy Jewish woman who is fraudulently deprived of her fortune by a pair of villains, setting off a chain of events that culminates in the expulsion of the Jews from Rome. The placement of these two episodes within the Pilate sequence appears to be for no other reason than their chronology; attempts to find a thematic unity among the adjacent Jesus, Paulina, and Fulvia episodes have not been convincing, so clearly the Jesus episode is to be grouped thematically with the other Pontius Pilate episodes.

## 5 The Language of the Pilate Episodes

The language of the Pilate episodes, like that of Josephus’s work in general, is historical, that is, it is oriented toward the narration of events. The sense of a passage is therefore centered around the various verbal forms (verbs, infinitives, participles and nominalizations) that carry the main story line and the facts and situations that support it.

### 5.1 Verbal Aspect in the *Jewish Antiquities*

In the *Jewish Antiquities*, as in Ancient and Koine Greek generally, aorist verbs signal the crucial event line. They are supplemented by subsidiary events presented in nonfinite verb forms – infinitives, participles, and nominalizations – that along with the finite aorist constitute event clusters. In the following, from the Signa episode, the aorist verb *epanekomisen* reports the main event “brought back”, while Pilate’s state of mind antecedent to his giving the order to restore the signa to Caesarea is reported in the aorist participle *thaumasas*:

(3)

Kai Pilatos thaumasas to ekhuron autōn epi phulakē tōn nomōn parakhrēma  
*and Pilate wondering the strong their devotion of-the laws forthwith*

tas eikonas ek tōn Hierosolumōn **epanekomisen** eis Kaisareian.  
*the signa out of Jerusalem brought-back:[aor] into Caesaria*

And Pilate, wondering at the strength of their devotion to the laws, forthwith took the signa out of Jerusalem and back to Caesarea.

In the next example, from the Aquifer episode, Pilate’s plan to distribute soldiers in disguise among the demonstrating Jews culminates in his order to the Jews to return home. The aorist *ekeleusen* is presented as the key event, the antecedent events being told in various imperfect and nonfinite verbs:

(4)

ho de stolē ekeinōn polu plēthos stratiōtōn ampekhomenon,  
*he in (Jewish) gowns of-those very many of-soldiers dressing*

hoi epheronto skutalas hupo tais stolais, diapempas  
*they carried:impf clubs under the gowns dispersing*

eis ho perielthoien autous autos **ekeleusen** anakhōrein.  
*in order that he could surround them he ordered to go home*

Dressing a large number of those soldiers in Jewish gowns – under which gowns they carried clubs – and sending them off in different directions in order to surround (the Jews), he ordered (the Jews) to go home.

The aorist in this kind of narrative favors discrete bounded actions performed by the principal protagonist, actions that are on the main story line of the episode and which carry the plot forward. These foregrounded events are supported by various kinds of background reporting, which may range from descriptions of setting and situation to antecedent events and significant events distributed over

a number of actors and times. In Greek, this background reporting is done not only with verbs in the imperfect, but also with nonfinite verb forms, that is, infinitives and participles (Fox 1983). Typically, a narrative moves along in short segments consisting of a cluster of aorist and imperfect verbs and supported by explanatory states and actions presented through participles, which may be present, aorist, or imperfect, and infinitives (nonfinite verb forms), and, quite often, nominalized verb forms.

The Pilate episodes in Book 18 of the *Jewish Antiquities* generally adhere to these same principles. An aorist cluster is found in the opening of the Signa narrative, where we read how Pilate resolves to confront Jewish laws by bringing military standards containing images of the Emperor into the hallowed grounds of the city:

(5)

Pilatōs de ho tēs Ioudaias hēgemōn stratiān ek Kaisareias agagōn

*Pilate then the of-the Jews leader army from Caesarea having-brought:aor prt*

kai methidrusas

kheimadioušan en Hierosolumois epi katalusei tōn

*and having-moved:aor prt intending to winter:fut prt in Jerusalem, for subversion of-the*

nomimōn tōn Ioudaikōn **ephronēse**, protomas Kaisaros, hai tais sēmaiais prosēsān,

*laws of-the Jewish resolved:aor busts of-emperor which to-the signa added:ipf*

eisagomenos eis tēn polin, eikonōn poiēsīn apagoreuontos hēmin tou nomou.

*bring:prt into the city of-icons making forbidding:prt us the law*

Now Pilate, the procurator of Judea, having brought his army from Caesarea and having moved it to the winter quarters in Jerusalem, in order to subvert the Jewish laws, resolved to bring into the city busts of the Emperor that were carried on the signa, although our laws forbid the making of icons.

Of the verbal forms, there is one aorist finite verb, *ephronēse*, here meaning something like “resolved, acted with intent, took it upon himself to, had the nerve to” (translated by Feldman [1965:43] as “took a bold step”). The aorist gathers together an array of participles, imperfects, infinitives and nominalizations to form the nucleus of an event cluster performed by the protagonist and by more peripheral actors. Many of these forms would normally be rendered in English as separate finite clauses.

The centrality of the finite aorist *ephronēse* (“took it upon himself to”) in the cluster brings into focus the true purpose of Pilate’s action. Indeed, we learn in the next paragraph that previous procurators had also brought military standards into Jerusalem, but for the sake of civil order had taken care to leave behind the icons of the Emperor normally attached to them:

(6)

kai dia touto hoi proteron hēgemones tais mē meta toiōnde kosmōn  
*and because-of this the previous procurators the not on such decorations*

sēmaiais epoiounto eisodon tē .  
*signa made:3p ipf entering the city*

And for this reason previous procurators made signa that had no such ornaments when they entered the city.

The imperfect *epoiounto* (“they made”) is appropriate here for the reporting of antecedent events by several agents at various times as a contrastive background to the single action of Pilate. The clear implication is that Pilate’s action was quite different from those of his predecessors, in that he resolved to defy and undermine Jewish practices by deliberately carrying likenesses of the emperor-god Tiberius into the sacred precincts of the Temple. The aorist highlights the fact that blame for the incidents that follow rests squarely on Pilate’s shoulders.

Pilate, in order to confront the Jews with a *fait accompli*, slips the standards into Jerusalem under cover of night. A throng of Jews go to Caesarea and petition Pilate to remove the standards:

(7)

hoi d’epei **egnōsan** kata plēthun parēsan eis Kaisareian hiketeian poioumenoi  
*they then when found-out:aor in throng appeared:ipf in Caesarea entreaties making*

e<sup>pi</sup> pollas hēmeras e<sup>pi</sup> metathesei tōn eikoōn.  
*over many days for removal of-the icons*

Then, when they found out, a throng showed up in Caesarea imploring him over many days to remove the icons.

Sentences such as these reveal clearly the distribution of work between the two finite past tenses, imperfect and aorist. The realization by the Jews of Pilate’s deed as reflected by the aorist *egnōsan* is sudden and simultaneous. It sets the stage for the following events. The imperfect *parēsan* by contrast suggests multiple agents carrying out actions that lasted for some time (*e<sup>pi</sup> pollas hēmeras* [“for several days”]).

## 5.2 Infinitives and Participles

In addition to the two past-tense systems of imperfect and aorist, a Greek verb may also appear in the form of an infinitive or a participle. The special role of

nonfinite forms has been well described in an article by Fox (1983), who shows how nonfinite verb forms (infinitives and participles) create different levels of backgrounding against which finite verbs do the main work of event reporting. The present participle *poioumenoi* (“making”) in (7) above illustrates the use of a non-finite form that is completed by the nominalized form *hiketeian* (“entreaties”), and which serves to amplify the finite verb *parēsan* (“appeared”).

### 5.3 Nominalizations

Supporting events may also be narrated through nouns, usually nouns that are derived from verbs and which have a verbal meaning. Such nominalizations are close in discourse meaning to participles in that they describe circumstances within an event cluster, such as (with the preposition *epi*) intentions and purposes behind actions by the main participants. In the Signa episode, the following examples of nominalizations appear:

- (8)
- i) *epi katalusei tōn nomimōn tōn loudaikōn* (“for the subversion of the Jewish laws”)
  - ii) *epi metathesei tōn eikoōn* (“for the removal of the icons”)
  - iii) *hiketeian poioumenoi* (“making entreaties, entreating”)

Nominalizations are, then, a resource for backgrounding in Greek narration. In the Aquifer episode, the noun *epagōgēn* (“a leading away, a conduit”), a nominalized form of the verb *epagō* (“bring in”), is the direct object of the aorist *epraksen* (“made, constructed”) in the opening event:

- (9)
- hudatōn d' epagōgēn eis ta Hierosoluma epraksen*  
*of the waters a conduit into the Jerusalem he -made*  
 he constructed an aquifer into Jerusalem

As here, a nominalized verb presented as the object of a general verb of making or doing such as *genesthai tēn eisodon* (“made entry”), *epagōgēn [...] praksen* (“constructed a conduit”) may be used in place of a different verb in a backgrounding context. In the Samaritan Uprising episode, *katathesin* (“deposit”) occurs as the direct object of the perfect participial form *poiēsamenou*:

- (10)
- Mōuseōs tēde autōn poiēsamenou katathesin*  
*Moses:gen to-this it having-made:gen deposit*  
 Moses having deposited it

## 5.4 Genitive Absolute

The preceding example (10) exemplifies a construction found frequently in Josephus as in Greek prose generally, the Genitive Absolute. This construction consists of a detached phrase in which the verb, if any, is represented by a participle in the genitive and the verb's subject is also in the genitive case. It is added, typically, as an aside that elaborates or explains a part of the episode. Grammatically, the genitive case subject of the genitive absolute is different from that of the main clause. In the Samaritan Uprising story, for instance, the information that the sacred vessels had been deposited in the mountains by Moses is presented parenthetically in a phrase in the genitive (*Mōuseōs [...] oiēsamenou*):

(11)

iskhurizeto te paragenomenois deixein ta hiera skeuē tēde katorōrugmena  
*he-promised:ipf and his-followers show the sacred vessels there buried*

Mōuseōs tēde autōn poiēsamenou katathesin.  
*Moses:gen there them:gen having-made:gen deposit:acc*

And he promised to show his followers the sacred vessels that were buried there, Moses having placed them there.

## 6 Tense and Aspect in the *Testimonium Flavianum*

The various narrative forms described above also appear in the *Testimonium Flavianum*, and the differences between their normal functions in Josephus's account of the doings of Pontius Pilate and their apparent use in the *Testimonium* are worthy of comment. We find the following narrative forms in the *Testimonium*:

### 6.1 Aorists (in bold face):

- i) kai pollous men Ioudaious pollous de kai tou Hellēnikou **epēgageto**.  
*and many both Jews many also and of-the Gentiles followed:aor middle.*  
and he was followed by many Jews and also by many Gentiles.
- ii) ouk **epausanto** hoi to prōton auton agapēsantes  
*not ceased:aor they at first him loving*  
those who had loved him before did not cease

- iii) eph[redacted]ar autois tritēn ekhōn hēmeran palin zōn  
*he-appeared:aor for to-them third having day again living*  
 for he appeared to them restored to life on the third day
- iv) Eiseti te nun tōn Khristianōn apo toude ōnomasmenōn ouk **epelipe** to phulon.  
*right-up-to and now of-the Christians after him named not has-ceased:aor the-tribe.*  
 And even up to the present the tribe of Christians named after him has not ceased to exist.

## 6.2 Imperfects (in bold face)

- i) **Ēn** gar paradoksōn ergōn poiētēs  
*he-was for of-wondrous deeds doer*  
 For he was a performer of miraculous deeds
- ii) Ho Khristos outos **ēn**.  
*The Messiah he was.*  
 He was the Messiah.

## 6.3 Participles (in bold face)

- i) didaskalos anthrōpōn tōn hedonē t'alēthē **dekhomenōn**  
*teacher of-men of-those with-pleasure and truth receiving*  
 a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure
- ii) staurō **epitetimēkotos** Pilatou  
*to-cross having-sentenced:gen Pilate:gen*  
 Pilate having sentenced him to the cross
- iii) ouk epausanto hoi to prōton auton **agapēsantes**  
*not ceased:aor they at first him having-loved*  
 those who had loved him before did not cease
- iv) ephanē gar autois tritēn **ekhōn** hēmeran palin **zōn**,  
*e-appeared for to-them third having day again living*  
 or he appeared to them restored to life on the third day

- v) *ephanē gar autois tritēn ekhōn hēmeran palin zōn,*  
*e-appeared for to-them third having day again living*  
 or he appeared to them restored to life on the third day
- vi) *tōn theiōn prophetōn tauta te kai alla muria thaumasia peri autou eirēkotōn.*  
*by-the divine prophets such things and other myriads miracles about him*  
*having-foretold.*  
 the divine prophets having foretold such things and many other thousands of  
 miracles concerning him.
- vii) *Eiseti te nun tōn Khristianōn apo toude ōnomasmenōn*  
*right-up-to and now of-the Christians after him having-been-named*

*ouk epelipe to phulon.*  
*not has-ceased the-tribe*

And even up to the present day the tribe of Christians named after him has  
 not ceased to exist.

#### 6.4 The Finite Verbs in the *Testimonium*

There are, then, four finite aorists and two finite imperfects, the latter both being the past tense of the verb ‘to be’, *ēn* (“he was”). The finite aorists report in a broad scale the past events concerning Jesus and his followers. That is, unlike the event reporting in the other Pontius Pilate episodes, we are not told in detail what Jesus did. Jesus is throughout a passive participant rather than an active agent. The aorist verbs that are used to describe Jesus reflect this passivity: *epēgageto* is a mediopassive (middle voice) verb, and *ephanē* is passive and also nonvolitional; that is, a supernatural force is at least complicit in Jesus’s reappearance. The other two aorists concern not Jesus but his followers, and, curiously, both are in the negative: *ouk epausanto* and *ouk epelipe*. We have seen that aorist verbs typically report single prominent actions associated with the protagonist of the story. They play a crucial role in the event structure of the narrative, and while they cannot alone support the story line, they work to anchor clusters of other kinds of verbs to create episodes. This could hardly be said of the aorists in the *Testimonium*, however. The aorists here seem to belong in a different genre altogether, one which argues and defends rather than reports.

The use of the negative in two of the four aorists suggests something else. Negatives point implicitly to the corresponding affirmative. They belong in the

contexts of denial, of response to a challenge. They suggest here that the author is contradicting unheard voices that question the truth of the chronicle. There is an element of protest in the voice of the author of the *Testimonium* that is impossible to attribute to Josephus, the sober historian: “There must be some truth in all this, because his followers haven’t gone away, in fact they haven’t stopped worshipping him.”

## 7 The Crucifixion

What of the one true event in the *Testimonium*, the crucifixion of Jesus? It is here that Pontius Pilate makes his sole appearance in this episode. Whereas in the other Pilate episodes he is the chief protagonist, in the *Testimonium* Pilate’s role is unmistakably subordinate. He is mentioned in the genitive absolute construction that was described earlier: his name is in the genitive case, and his action in sentencing Jesus is brushed off in four words, one of them a perfect participle, also in the genitive case. Whereas in the other Pilate passages Pilate is depicted as going out of his way to act with premeditation (in the Signa passage the verb used is *ephronēse*, i.e., acted deliberately, with malice aforethought), and as the explicit instigator of acts of repression against Jews, there is now a distinct indirectness. Not only is Pilate’s involvement in the condemning of Jesus relegated to a peripheral clause (*auton [...] staurō epitetimēkotos Pilatou*) but the blame for this action is transferred to the Jewish elders (*endeiksē tōn prōtōn andrōn par’ hēmin*):

(12)

Kai auton endeiksē tōn prōtōn andrōn par’ hēmin staurō epitetimēkotos Pilatou

And on indictment by the first men among us, Pilate having sentenced him to the cross, [...]

So Pilate, the decisive Roman boss of the other three Pilate episodes, ruthless scourge of the Jews and despiser of their laws, now appears as the compliant puppet of the Jewish hierarchy. But the actions of the elders and Pilate are themselves secondary to the main point of the passage as identified by the aorist verbs, namely Jesus’s resurrection and the continued devotion of Jesus’s followers, which are presented as skeletal happenings for the entire passage. Again, the grammatical structure of the *Testimonium* is at odds with that of the sequence of Pontius Pilate, in which the chief protagonist is Pilate himself.

## 8 Narrative Structure

### 8.1 Temporality

The distribution of verbal forms is a microlevel phenomenon that has a counterpart in the macrolevel that has to do with how time is organized in a narrative. The time organization in the *Testimonium* is strikingly different from that of the surrounding text. For example, the narrative of the Aquifer is filled with particular details – the rioters shouting insults, the Roman soldiers going among the crowd in Jewish dress, the order to the demonstrators to disperse, the overreaction of the soldiers, and the bloody suppression of the riot. At each point we know not only what the actors did, but why they did it, and what the causes and effects of their actions were. The Aquifer episode, like the other episodes involving Pontius Pilate, has an event structure. Time in these episodes is *kairoitic*, that is, it is qualitative time (*kairos*) experienced by individual actors.<sup>9</sup> It is eventive time, the *temps événementiel* of the *Annales* school of historiography (see, e.g., Braudel 1972–4). By contrast, the temporality of the *Testimonium* is *chronic* (*chronos*), that is, it is part of the general temporality of human history. It takes place in a more remote perspective of slow changes and general truths; it is *temps conjoncturel*, the time of social movements and social reorganization. It has a bird’s-eye view of its subject, scanning the entire life of Jesus and his influence in no particular order, anachronistically (Genette 1980:34). In the *Testimonium* there are happenings but no events, because events in order to qualify as such must be integrated into an eventive frame, that is, a story, and must have sequence and causal interconnections (Ricoeur 1981; Croft 1991: 269). So the *Testimonium* belongs to a different kind of time from the rest of the *Jewish Antiquities*. The temporality of the *Testimonium* derives from its presumed familiarity to its audience, which in turn is more compatible with a third century or later Christian setting than a first century Roman one. Ricoeur notes: “As soon as a story is well known...to follow the story is not so much to enclose the surprises or discoveries within our recognition of the meaning attached to the story, as to apprehend the episodes which are themselves well known as leading to this end.” Significantly, Ricoeur goes on: “A new quality of time emerges from this understanding” (Ricoeur 1981:67).

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<sup>9</sup> For a historical discussion of the concept of *kairos*, see Onians (1951).

## 8.2 Emplotment

This brings us to another point: unlike the *Testimonium*, the actions of the participants in the Aquifer episode (and those of the other two Pontius Pilate episodes, the Signa and the Samaritan Uprising) are comprehensible in terms of *emplotment*. The Aquifer story is a narration in which a situation is established and the characters interact, and there is a resolution. It has a plot in the way that recent narrative theorists have stipulated: in Paul Ricoeur's terms, plot is "the intelligible whole that governs the succession of events in any story," and "Plot makes events into a story" (Ricoeur 1981:65). The same is true of the other two Pilate episodes, that is, the Signa episode and the Samaritan Uprising. The careful crafting of emplotment is an essential part of Josephus's skill as a historian.

The *Testimonium* has no such plot. From the point of view of its place in Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*, it does not qualify as a narrative at all. The *Testimonium* could not be understood as a story except by someone who could already place it in its "intelligible whole", the context of early Christianity. The *Testimonium* gains its intelligibility not through its reporting of novel events but by virtue of being a "repetition of the familiar" (Ricoeur 1981:67) – familiarity here meaning familiarity to a third century Christian readership, not to a first century Roman one. The "intelligible whole" posited by Ricoeur as the indispensable foundation for a story does not lie, as it does for the other events told by Josephus in this part of the *Jewish Antiquities*, in the larger narrative of the interlocking destinies of Rome and Jerusalem, but instead in the Gospel story of the Christian New Testament, and it is from the Gospels, and the Gospels alone, that the Jesus Christ narrative in the *Testimonium* draws its coherence and its legitimacy as a plot, and perhaps even some of its language. It is not just that the Christian origin of the *Testimonium* is betrayed by its allegiance to the Gospels, a  without the Gospels the passage is incomprehensible. Once again to draw on Paul Ricoeur, the *Testimonium* does not so much *narrate* to first century Romans new events, but rather *reminds* third century Christians of events already familiar to them.

## 8.3 Genre

In Swales's (1990) analysis, we must look past the language of a text in order to identify its genre. A genre, Swales argues, is ultimately rooted in the practices of the discourse community that creates and uses it. The *Testimonium* is anchored in a radically different discourse community from that of the rest of the *Jewish Antiquities*. The *Testimonium* reads more like a position paper, a party manifesto, than a narrative. Unlike the rest of the *Jewish Antiquities*, it has the same generic

ambiguity between myth and history that Kermode (1979) has noted in the Gospels as a whole. Its novelty for its intended readers lies not in the historical narrative itself but in its political insertion into the context of Josephus' bitter account of the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate, and its affirmation to the Christian world that contemporary pagan historians had after all taken note of the earthly life of Jesus Christ. It is, in other words, a political interpolation. It serves to validate the Christian claim of the crucifixion of the sect's founder during Pilate's administration, and, by positioning its text within that of the genre "history", with its ethos of truth, to warrant the historical authenticity of the Gospels. But told as a series of new events to a first century Roman audience unfamiliar with it, the *Testimonium* would have been a bizarre addition and probably quite unintelligible.

The *Testimonium Flavianum* qualifies poorly as an example of either history or narrative. Where, then, does it fit generically? The closest generic match for the *Testimonium* is perhaps the various creeds that began to be formulated in the early fourth century, such as the Nicene Creed (325 CE).<sup>10</sup> Some credal elements are clearly present: Jesus was the Messiah; he was crucified under Pontius Pilate (*passus sub Pontio Pilato*, in the words of the Apostles' Creed); he came back to life on the third day after his death; the movement founded by him – the Christian church – continues to flourish; he performed miracles; the biblical prophets foretold many details of his life. Less specifically credal, but similar in character to the creeds, are its length (77 Greek words, comparable to the 76 words of the Latin Apostles' Creed and the 91 words of the Greek Apostles' Creed)<sup>11</sup> and the sycophantic tone of the confirmed believer ("had a following among both Jews and Gentiles", "appeared to them alive after the third day", "the biblical prophets foretold his many miracles"). The unmotivated introduction of Jesus immediately after the opening *ginetai* ("there happened") is also structurally reminiscent of credal formulas such as *credo in unum deum* etc.

Creeds are as much political statements as theological ones. They come about after fierce and, often, long lasting disputes, such as the Nicene Creed, devised in the wake of the bitter contest over the Arian heresy. They present a non-negotiable statement of current beliefs drawn up by the winners. They respond to the need to constrain and reassure believers, and to confront nonbelievers (in this case, the Jews) and divide them sharply from believers. The *Testimonium* reflects

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<sup>10</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea (263–339) is sometimes mentioned as a possible author of the *Testimonium* source of the interpolation (see Feldman 1965: 49). This same Eusebius, whose writings contain the first known citation of the *Testimonium Flavianum*, was also one of the creators of the Nicene Creed and played a central role in the wording and propagation of the creed.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.creeds.net/ancient/apostles.htm>.

what had by the third century CE become a commonplace of Christianity: that culpability for the death of Jesus rested with the Jews.<sup>12</sup> It is made clear in the *Testimonium* that Pilate's agency is indirect: the true agents are "the first men among us", the Jewish leaders who effect the "indictment" of Jesus, Pilate's role being limited to pronouncing the death sentence. The "among us" is unequivocal: responsibility for the death of Jesus lies with Josephus's fellow-countrymen, the Jews, not with the Romans, and in this too the *Testimonium* is hard to reconcile with Josephus's denunciation of Pilate's crimes against the Jews. The Josephus of the *Testimonium* is represented as aligning himself with the Christians (versus the Jews) and admitting that the blame for the crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah lies with the Jews; it need hardly be said that such an admission on Josephus's part is inconceivable.

## 9 Conclusion

The narrative grammar of the *Testimonium Flavianum* sets it sharply apart from Josephus's other stories of the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate. The most likely explanation is that the entire passage is interpolated, presumably by Christians embarrassed at Josephus's manifest ignorance of the life and death of Jesus. The *Jewish Antiquities* would in this respect be consistent with the other chronicler of this age, Josephus's contemporary and rival historian, Justus of Tiberias, who wrote a history of this period that conflicted with Josephus and claimed Josephus's version to be self-serving. Justus's work has not survived, but we know from other sources that he wrote in great detail about the exact period of Tiberius's reign that coincided with Jesus's ministry – and that he did not mention Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Outside the Gospels, there is no independent contemporary (i.e., first century CE) account of these events. The silence of other commentators, and the absence of any mention of the *Testimonium* by Christian writers for two full centuries after Josephus, even when engaged in fierce polemic about Jesus, are strong indications that the passage was not present in Josephus's own extraordinarily detailed account of this period. The activities of a religious fanatic who moved around Galilee and Judaea preaching a gospel of peace and salvation, was said to have performed miracles, was followed by crowds of thousands of adoring disciples, and within the space of a few hours invaded the hallowed grounds of

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<sup>12</sup> For the increasing prominence of this view in the second and third centuries CE, see Ehrman (1997).

<sup>13</sup> We know this because Photius, the ninth century patriarch of Constantinople, who read Justus' works, found it remarkable that he did not mention Jesus, and commented on it.

the Temple, was hauled up before the Sanhedrin, tried by King Herod, interrogated by Pontius Pilate and crucified, all amid public tumult, made no impression on history-writers of the period.

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