maybe this book can help someone become a Puritan reader, a wise man who takes the valuable time for the gems of the past and becomes a person who has understanding for reading people like John Owen. For me, this book stirred my intellectual will and heart to dive deeper into Owen's mind through his works. I hope it will stir other readers, too, both lay readership and pastoral ones.

Matej Sakač

T. C. Schmidt
Josephus and Jesus: New Evidence for the One Called Christ
Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025, pp. 317

In a stimulating piece of detective work spanning a thousand years using five ancient languages, T. C. Schmidt has succeeded in re-opening, and likely overturning, a near consensus of scholarship that the *Testimonium Flavianum* (TF), a brief section of text from Josephus' *Antiquities* (18.63–64) about Jesus, is either heavily interpolated by later Christians or wholly inauthentic. Schmidt demonstrates, rather convincingly in my view, that the TF can be shown to be wholly authentic, written by Flavius Josephus in the late first century CE. Below is the Greek text of the TF along with the traditional English translation by Whiston:[1]

> [63] Γίνεται δὲ κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον Ἰησοῦς σοφὸς ἀνήρ, εἴγε ἄνδρα αὐτὸν λέγειν χρή· ἦν γὰρ παραδόξων ἔργων ποιητής, διδάσκαλος ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἡδονῇ τἀληθῆ δεχομένων, καὶ πολλοὺς μὲν Ἰουδαίους, πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἐπηγάγετο· ὁ χριστὸς οὗτος ἦν. [64] καὶ αὐτὸν ἐνδείξει τῶν πρώτων ἀνδρῶν παρ᾽ ἡμῖν σταυρῷ ἐπιτετιμηκότος Πιλάτου οὐκ ἐπαύσαντο οἱ τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαπήσαντες· ἐφάνη γὰρ αὐτοῖς τρίτην ἔχων ἡμέραν πάλιν ζῶν, τῶν θείων προφητῶν ταῦτά τε καὶ ἄλλα μυρία περὶ αὐτοῦ θαυμάσια εἰρηκότων. εἰς ἔτι τε νῦν τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀπὸ τοῦδε ὠνομασμένον οὐκ ἐπέλιπε τὸ φῦλον.

> [63]Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; [64] and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other

1 The Greek text is taken from the Accordance digital version, based on the 1890 edition of B. Niese, *Flavii Iosephi Opera*. The English translation is from William Whiston, *The Works of Flavius Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, New Updated Edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987).

> wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.

When most students first read the brief, approximately 90-word TF,[2] their initial response tends to be one of surprise, either an affirmative surprise that this ancient Jewish writer would have such positive things to say about Jesus, and/or an equal surprise that one who could write these words was not in fact a Christian. The seeming pro-Christian, or perhaps even confessional words, seem implausible, if not an outright impossibility, to come from the pen of a Jewish writer known *not* to be a Christian. Moreover, the TF would be, if authentic, one of the earliest, fullest, and most contextually close non-Christian historical reports about the life of Jesus of Nazareth and in more or less consistent accord with the Gospel accounts. Perhaps because of these apparent paradoxes, most modern scholars have denied the full authenticity of the passage. Some deny Josephus wrote anything at all about Jesus of Nazareth, concluding the TF to be an early forgery by a Christian scribe inserted into the manuscript tradition of the *Antiquities.* The more mainstream position is that Josephus did indeed write something about Jesus, perhaps rather unremarkable, which was then interpolated later by a Christian to express essential Christian beliefs about Jesus.

Schmidt challenges the consensus position based on the TF's reception history, two key textual variations that emerge in the Latin and Syriac textual traditions, the style and content of the passage, and the historical plausibility of Josephan authorship. It is somewhat ironic that the passage most modern readers find at first glance to be overtly pro-Christian was not so received by early Christian writers. Schmidt shows that in its Greek, western (Latin), and eastern (Syriac, Arabic) reception, the general tenor is one of caution and restraint. Many patristic authors do not find the TF to be as pro-Christian as later readers have found it. This reception evidence prompts Schmidt's investigation into why early Christian authors lacked the enthusiasm we might assume they would have.

In fact, Schmidt demonstrates that the wording of the Greek text of the TF is quite ambiguous. While aspects of the text could be taken in a positive sense, most of the passage is equivocal, allowing for different construals, and possibly even pointing to an overall negative portrayal of Jesus. Moreover, Schmidt shows that the terms the TF uses are not the ways early Christians described Jesus, possibly because of the ambiguity of these terms or possible negative connotations. In addition, he establishes that the vocabulary and phraseology of the TF are clearly Josephan.

The work is divided into two parts. Part 1 is entitled "The Authenticity of the *Testimonium Flavianum*", the first two chapters of which deal with the Greek

2 The Greek text above contains 89 words. However, Schmidt's argument for two additional words based on evidence in other versions suggest the original Greek text would have contained 91 words (see below).

reception (chapter 1), and then the western and eastern reception (chapter 2). Chapter three, "An Authorial Commentary on the *Testimonium Flavianum*", is the longest chapter of the book, and rightly so, for it is the crux of the argument. There, Schmidt engages in line by line exegesis of the TF, which leads into the concluding chapter (4) of part 1, "Authenticity and Possible Translations of the *Testimonium Flavianum*."

Part 2 is entitled "The Sources of Josephus and the Meaning of the *Testimonium Flavianum*." Here, in chapters five and six, Schmidt brilliantly unravels Josephus' social network to identify the most likely sources for Josephus' knowledge of Jesus, with a particular emphasis in chapter 6 on identifying those whom Josephus described as "the first men among us" who brought an accusation against Jesus to Pilate. The concluding chapter seven provides a summary of the overall argument of the book with implications for how an authentic *Testimonium Flavianum* impacts our understanding of the Jesus of history. The volume is copiously supplemented by six appendices, each of which probes more deeply into issues that are germane to the thesis of the book.

Since Schmidt's argument largely hinges on his exegesis of the TF in chapter three, I will highlight several examples of the neutrality or ambiguity of the Greek text that Schmidt emphasizes.

In the first of two crucial pieces of textual evidence, Schmidt points out that in the Greek text of the TF preserved in manuscript of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, the name Jesus is followed by the indefinite pronoun τις, a variation also reflected in ancient Syriac and Armenian translations. Introducing Jesus as Ἰησοῦς τις, "a certain Jesus," not only gives the passage an ambiguous flavor, but it is also one of the devices Josephus employs to recount characters of questionable repute, including, notably, other messianic claimants such as Menahem and Simon, as well as many other historical figures in his narrative (See Schmidt, 67–68). The inclusion of τις is not only consistent with Josephan usage elsewhere, but it would also leave readers with at least an ambiguous, or even negative expectation of the description of Jesus in the lines to follow. Finally, it would certainly not be the way a Christian interpolator would introduce Jesus.

Next, the TF reports at the beginning that Jesus was a σοφός ("wise") man. While early Christians unquestionably affirmed the wisdom of Jesus, they rarely called him a σοφός, likely because this word could have possible negative links to pagan wise men. Soon after, Josephus writes that Jesus was "a doer of miraculous deeds" (παραδόξων ἔργων ποιητής). Again, at first glance, this seems to be a pro-Christian assertion, consistent with the Gospels and early Christian belief. However, as Schmidt shows, Jesus' Jewish opponents always admitted his miraculous deeds. This is evident in antagonistic Rabbinic writings where Jesus was accused of practicing sorcery (Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 43a.20) and is alluded to in the Gospels themselves (Matt 12:22-27 and parallels). Furthermore,

Schmidt shows that the Greek term translated here as "miracles," παράδοξος, was quite ambiguous, and while it need not always have a negative connotation, it could point to something incredible, unusual, spectacular, or even nefarious. It could easily be read to suggest Jesus had the power to do incredible deeds, but ones that were ultimately deceptive and even diabolical. Indeed, this term is only used once in the NT (Luke 5:26) where it is employed to narrate the reaction of the crowds at Jesus healing of the paralytic, and there it is often translated as "strange things."[3] The New Testament writers themselves use other words to describe and affirm Jesus' miraculous works. Schmidt also shows from elsewhere in the *Antiquities* (2.285–6) that Josephus uses παράδοξος in combination with σοφός to describe Pharaoh's court magicians in the Exodus narrative. Hence, the term is employed often by Josephus, and often negatively, but it is not common in the New Testament. Schmidt thus concludes that "it does not seem likely that a Christian would have inserted such a term as παράδοξος into the TF" (p. 75).

That point can also be made for the line translated "if it be lawful to call him a man." When modern Christians read this, their first thought is that it shockingly makes a claim for Jesus' divinity. But Schmidt cautions that first, questioning the *humanity* of Jesus would have been heretical for early Christian writers who would therefore not have interpolated such a statement. Second, this expression could be derogatory, suggesting that Jesus was *less than* a man or diabolical, or it could have been a sarcastic expression, as Josephus was prone to make, or a divine epithet that Josephus elsewhere uses for Moses or Elijah. Again, the portrait of Jesus the TF paints is somewhat obscure, but the terminology and phraseology employed can be shown to be Josephan, and not Christian.

The TF also refers to Jesus as "a teacher of men who receive truth with pleasure." But again, the precise terminology in the Greek text is much less overtly positive than the English translation might suggest. The key terms are ἡδονῇ (with pleasure) and τἀληθῆ, which Schmidt translates as "truism." Schmidt shows that the word ἡδονη was a negative term in most early Christian writers, and the form τἀληθῆ never appears in the OT Greek or New Testament, each of which employs the form ἀληθής ("truth"). The tension of "pleasure" and "truism" suggests a statement more ambiguous than positive, and, crucially, these are not the terms that an early Christian interpolator would use.

The TF also describes Jesus as leading many from among Jews and Greeks. As Schmidt (pp. 80–81) points out, the Gospels do not portray Jesus as leading Greeks, but rather as being sent to the lost sheep of Israel. But more significantly, the word translated by Whiston "drew over," ἐπηγήγατο, could be understood, and often is used in such a way in Josephus, to mean something more like "to lead away," that is, to mislead.

3 Indeed, it is not a biblical term. The eight occurrences in the Greek Old Testament (LXX) are all from apocryphal books.

In a compelling argument, Schmidt refers to a passage from *Antiquities* (17.327–329) that he says is "much underappreciated by scholars." There, Josephus narrates a certain imposter of Alexander, the son of Herod. Schmidt (p. 82) summarizes the narrative thus:

"Taken together, Josephus claims that the false Alexander 'convinced' or even 'led astray' (ἐπηγάγετο) certain men (ἀνθρώπων) because they 'received' (δεχόμενον) his words 'with pleasure' (ἡδονῇ)."

That Josephus appropriates a similar combination of terms for an imposter as he does for Jesus at the very least makes this TF statement ambiguous.

Schmidt similarly gathers many other such parallels from Josephus to show not only that the language of the TF is Josephan, but also that it is ambiguous. Further, he demonstrates that these particular words and phrases are decidedly *not* what a Christian interpolator would choose to rework a passage to make it more explicitly Christian.

The end of line 63, however, seems to be the most explicit "Christian" statement of all, "He was the Christ." Here Schmidt (p. 86) appeals to the textual evidence. Jerome's late 4th-century Latin translation of the TF reads *Christus credebatur esse* ("was believed to be the Christ"), and later Syriac versions of the TF are similarly worded: "it was thought he was the Christ." These Latin and Syriac witnesses suggest another textual tradition different from that transmitted in the extant Greek. Schmidt concludes that the evidence from the Latin and Syriac versions indicates the likelihood that the original Greek of the TF included the participle λεγόμενος, so that the line would read "he was called the Christ," rather than "he was the Christ." Indeed, this term is precisely what Josephus used to describe Jesus in *Antiquities* 20.200: Ἰησοῦ τοῦ λεγομένου Χριστοῦ ("Jesus who is called Christ"), the only other reference to Jesus in Josephus' writings.

Another major point is the line that appears to be about the resurrection, translated: "for he appeared to them alive again the third day" (ἐφάνη γὰρ αὐτοῖς τρίτην ἔχων ἡμέραν πάλιν ζῶν). Again, at first glance, especially in translation, this statement would appear to be an assertion by Josephus of the resurrection, or at least some kind of appearance of Jesus to his disciples. But the Greek term φαίνω, here in the aorist ἐφάην, can mean both "appear" but also "to seem to be," when followed by a subordinating participle as in the TF (ἐφάνη... ζῶν) so that Schmidt proposes the translation "he appeared to them to be alive," or "it seemed to them that he was alive." These translations are perfectly possible from the Greek wording, for which Schmidt provides many examples from the literature, including Josephus' deployment of φαίνω in over 100 occurrences. At the very least, the employment of φαίνω with the participle is ambiguous and could be understood differently by different readers. Moreover, Schmidt (p. 100) demonstrates that regarding Jesus' resurrection, early Christian accounts tended use the verb ὁράω, and not φαίνω (Matt 28:7, 10; Luke 24:34; Acts 13:31; 1 Cor

15:5-8), and the construction in the TF about the third day (τρίτην ἔχων ἡμέραν) is not the construction Christian texts use (τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ).

If Schmidt succeeds in part 1 in establishing the authenticity of the TF based on a textual analysis of the passage in light of Josephus' writings and other evidence, he significantly strengthens that argument by showing in part 2 the plausibility of Josephus having access to first-hand accounts of Jesus' trial and execution.

At the beginning of line 64 of the TF, the reader finds this statement: "and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross..." Schmidt shows that the first-person plural statement "the principal men amongst us" (τῶν πρώτων ἀνδρῶν παρ' ἡμῖν) is quite Josephan. Furthermore, Schmidt ably shows how Josephus would have been, as a member of a Jerusalem priestly family and a Pharisee, well-connected with the leading men of Jerusalem. Furthermore, the personal relationships Josephus describes elsewhere with high priestly figures, the Herodians, and leading families make it highly likely that Josephus personally knew some of the figures who were present, as younger men, at the trial of Jesus. Schmidt crafts a fascinating picture of first-century Judaism and Christianity from which Josephus emerges as a historian who very likely had insider information on the trial and crucifixion of Jesus and the early Christian movement.

I have attempted to highlight key points from Schmidt's argument, but that does not reflect the breadth and depth of material that the book covers, which the reader is strongly encouraged to explore themselves.[4]

Schmidt's book not only makes a compelling argument for the authenticity of the *Testimonium Flavianum*, but it also makes a significant contribution to historical Jesus studies and our understanding of the historical events surrounding the arrest, trial, and execution of Jesus of Nazareth, and also regarding the testimonies of early Christians about his resurrection. I highly recommend it to all students of early Christianity and second-temple Judaism.

Gregory S. Thellman

4 And that should not be hard to do since a generous donor provided a gift to make the pdf version of the book freely available for download: https://josephusandjesus.com.