

HOW RELIABLE IS THE JOSEPHUS MATERIAL ON JOHN THE BAPTIST?

The Christians made sure that the writings of Josephus mentioned Jesus with clumsy forgeries. His short Testament about Jesus reads like a creed.

Some Christians feel the Testament was just a complete replacement for what Josephus really wrote which might have been an accusation that Jesus was a scoundrel who deserved to be executed and who arranged a fake resurrection. They wonder if the Jewish lie that Jesus was stolen from the tomb by his disciples that Matthew says they believe to this day could have been repeated in Josephus's treatment of Jesus.

So the Jesus material is problematic. Even the material on Jesus' close associate John the Baptist has been questioned too.

Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography, John Dominic Crossan, HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1994 remarks on page 38 that Josephus' treatment of the story of John the Baptist is strange and uncharacteristic of Josephus. Josephus would never praised apocalyptic and end of the world prophets such as John and was against them as they promoted instability in the empire. Yet he describes John as a good man.

He says that John's followers obeyed his every request and was about to gain such control over a huge number of people that Herod started to worry and decided to get rid of him.

Strangely Josephus takes some time to assert that John's baptism did not have sacramental powers but was merely a sign of repentance. He says it was administered to the Jews. Then he says that "others" joined John's huge fan base. He doesn't say who the others are. This has been worked over by someone.

The account simply says that John was executed at Macheras. The gospels alone say that John was executed by beheading. They say that the daughter of Herodias manipulated Herod to have him killed. The account may have been invented by the author of the first gospel because it matches a story in Livy's History of Rome Book 39 that could have been known to him when he sojourned in Rome.

John Dominic Crossan asks why John baptised in the Jordan when there was plenty of water in other places. He concludes John was symbolically taking people to the wilderness. They got baptised and were sent back into the promised land as if they were after being purified in the waters. The baptism was a symbolic purification and shows that John was expecting a holy war and sanctioning it. This war would drive the Romans out of the Holy Land (page 49, Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography).

