

Romans/Greek Sources

Tacitus, Annals 15.44
(55-120 C.E.) Historian, formerly secretary to emperor

“But neither human help, nor imperial munificence, nor all the modes of placating Heaven, could stifle scandal or dispel the belief that the fire had taken place by order. Therefore to scotch the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more...”

Pliny the Younger, Letters 10.96
(61-113 C.E.) Governor of Bithynia, writing to emperor Trajan

“It is my custom to refer all my difficulties to you, Sir, for no one is better able to resolve my doubts and inform my ignorance. I have never been present at an examination of Christians... For the moment this is the line I have taken with all persons brought before me on the charge of being Christians. I have asked them in person if they are Christians, and if they admit it, I repeat the question a second and third time, with a warning of the punishment awaiting them. If they persist, I order them to be led away for execution...”

“An anonymous pamphlet has been circulated which contains the names of a number of accused persons. Among these I considered that I should dismiss any who denied that they were or ever had been Christians, when they had repeated after me a formula of invocation to the gods and had made offerings of wine and incense to your statue, none of which things, I understand, any genuine Christian can be induced to do. Others, whose names were given me by an informer, first admitted the charge and then denied it; they said they had ceased to be Christians two or more years previously...”

“They also declared that the sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this: they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately among themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god... This made me decide it was all the more necessary to extract the truth by torture from two slave-women, whom they call deaconesses. I found nothing but a degenerate sort of cult carried to extravagant lengths. I have therefore postponed any further examination and hastened to consult you...”

Mara bar Serapion, letter
(73-160) Syrian Stoic philosopher

“For what else have we to say, when wise men are forcibly dragged by the hands of tyrants, and their wisdom is taken captive by calumny, and they are oppressed in their intelligence without defense? For what advantage did the Athenians gain by their murder of Socrates.... Or the people of Samos by the burning of Pythagoras... Or the Jews by the death of their wise king, because from that time their kingdom was taken away?”

“For with justice did God make recompense to the wisdom of these three: for the Athenians died of famine; and the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea without remedy; and the Jews, desolate and driven from their own kingdom, are scattered through every country. Socrates is not dead, because of Plato; neither Pythagoras, because of the statue of Juno; nor the wise King, because of the laws which he promulgated.”

Jewish Sources

Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*

(66-73) Participant on both sides of the Jewish War

“About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, on hearing him accused by men of highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him.”

Agapius, *Universal History*

Condensation of Josephus in Arabic, 10th century

“Similarly Josephus the Hebrew.... At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.”

Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin*

A tradition from the period 70-200

“On the eve of Passover Yeshua was hanged. For forty days before the execution a herald went forth and cried, “He is going to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.” But since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of Passover.”