

The Testimonium Flavianum in Syriac and Arabic

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‘Agapius of Hierapolis’ and Michael the Syrian’s versions of the Testimonium Flavianum, a passage about Jesus from Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities*, both derive from the Syriac translation of Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Michael’s Testimonium is more authentic than Agapius’ Testimonium, and it is more authentic than the *textus receptus* in reading that Jesus was ‘thought to be the Messiah’. Some features of Agapius’ Testimonium previously considered to be more authentic than the *textus receptus* can be explained by distinctive readings in the Syriac text that Agapius used.

Keywords: Agapius, Michael the Syrian, Testimonium Flavianum, Josephus.

It has been some time since Shlomo Pines drew scholarly attention to distinctive Arabic and Syriac versions of the famous and controversial Testimonium Flavianum,¹ a passage about Jesus present in all extant manuscripts of Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities* (*Ant.* 18.63–64).² These two distinctive versions can be found in two different medieval Christian chronicles: the tenth-century Arabic chronicle of Agapius, Melkite bishop of Hierapolis; and the twelfth-century Syriac chronicle of Michael the Syrian, Monophysite patriarch of Antioch (1166–1199). Agapius’ Testimonium differs widely from the Greek *textus receptus* Testimonium. Pines proposed that it was closer to Josephus’ original passage about Jesus than the *textus receptus* Testimonium because, in his words, it seemed to contain less ‘pronounced Christian traits’ than the *textus receptus*.³ Pines paid much less attention to Michael’s version of the Testimonium, which is quite close to the *textus receptus*. Noting that Michael’s Testimonium shares a few distinctive elements in

1 Shlomo Pines, *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and its Implications* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Arts and Humanities, 1971).

2 The secondary literature on the *Testimonium Flavianum* is enormous in part because its authenticity has been in dispute since the late sixteenth century. A relatively concise overview of recent literature can be found in J. Carleton-Paget, ‘Some Observations on Josephus and Christianity’, *JTS* (n.s.) 52.2 (2001) 539–624.

3 Pines, *Arabic Version*, 66.

common with Agapius' version of the Testimonium that are lacking in the *textus receptus* Testimonium, Pines proposed that Michael and Agapius had used common sources. Thus Michael's Testimonium was important for Pines mainly insofar as it could explain the origin of Agapius' Testimonium. This article argues that Michael's Testimonium is closer to what Josephus originally wrote about Jesus than Agapius' Testimonium, and it asserts that in at least one important respect Michael's Testimonium is also more authentic than the *textus receptus* Greek Testimonium Flavianum. It also aims to show that some of the distinctive elements in Agapius' Testimonium that Pines considered to be neutral or non-Christian, and thus reflecting Josephus' original text, can be accounted for by distinctive elements in the original Syriac source that Agapius paraphrased for his own version of the Testimonium.

The Testimonia of Agapius and Michael the Syrian

As already indicated, Agapius' Arabic Testimonium differs widely from the *textus receptus*. Pines translated it as follows:

at this time there was wise man who was called Jesus. And 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. And 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.

In contrast to Agapius' version of the Testimonium, Michael the Syrian's version is quite close to the *textus receptus*, although it shares a few common elements with Agapius' Testimonium that are lacking in the *textus receptus*. Pines argued that the overall vocabulary of Michael's Testimonium indicated that it was based on the Testimonium taken from the Syriac translation of Eusebius of Caesarea's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. From these facts Pines concluded that Michael's Testimonium reflected a mixture of both the Testimonium translated by the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and the original source of Agapius' Testimonium, which Pines assumed be independent of the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

Pines concluded that Agapius' Testimonium was more authentic than either the *textus receptus* Testimonium or Michael's Testimonium because he focused almost entirely on its content. For Pines, Agapius' Testimonium must be more authentic because it weakens the more Christian-sounding elements of both Michael's Testimonium and the *textus receptus*. Unlike the *textus receptus* Testimonium, Agapius' text specifically fails to ask if it is necessary to call Jesus a man; it does not clearly call Jesus' deeds miraculous; it does not mention a role for Jewish leaders in Jesus' death; it makes Jesus' *post mortem* appearance clearly the report of his disciples; and it qualifies Jesus' Messianic status in a dubitative way.

There are weaknesses with Pines' *a priori* argument from content that Agapius' Testimonium must be closer to Josephus' original passage about Jesus than Michael's Testimonium or the *textus receptus* because it is less Christian-sounding. Pines himself noted that too much past critique of the *textus receptus* Testimonium was based on assumptions about what Josephus' attitude towards Jesus must have been rather than actual textual evidence.⁴ In fact, much of the past impetus for labeling the *textus receptus* Testimonium a forgery has been based on earlier scholars' anachronistic assumptions that, as a Jew, Josephus could not have written anything favorable about Jesus. Contemporary scholars of primitive Christianity are less inclined than past scholars to assume that most first-century Jews necessarily held hostile opinions of Jesus, and they are more aware that the line between Christians and non-Christian Jews in Josephus' day was not as firm as it would later become.⁵ The implication of this is that supposedly Christian-sounding elements in either the *textus receptus* or in Michael's Testimonium cannot be ruled inauthentic *a priori*. Moreover, in order to assess the relative authenticity of Agapius' and Michael's Testimonia, it is crucial to first resolve from what sources they are derived.⁶

Sources of Agapius and Michael the Syrian

At the time that Pines' wrote his monograph on Agapius' Testimonium, relatively little was known about the sources of Agapius' and Michael's chronicles and their mutual relationship. However, since then critical scholars of early Islam have devoted a considerable amount of effort to establishing the relationship between Agapius' and Michael's chronicles. Their interest in the two chronicles derives from the fact that their common source contains a narrative account of the seventh- and eighth-century Muslim conquests of the Roman Near East that long predates the earliest Muslim narrative accounts of these conquests. This source, which unfortunately is no longer extant in its original form, was the Syriac chronicle of the Maronite Christian, Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785).⁷

4 Pines, *Arabic Version*, 21.

5 Alice Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003) 104–5, 148, 204–7, *passim*.

6 Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus*, 188. Pines himself acknowledged the importance to his thesis about Agapius' Testimonium of 'examining the sources of the portion of Agapius' chronicle dealing with the period of the Second Temple and the early centuries of Christianity' (*Arabic Version*, 68).

7 See Lawrence I. Conrad, 'The Conquest of Arwad', *Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* (ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad; Princeton: Darwin, 1992) 322–38, and Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton: Darwin, 1996) 400–409, 416–19, 440–42. Hoyland calls this work 'the Syriac common source', and attempts to reconstruct its narrative of the early Muslim conquests (*Seeing Islam*, 631–71). This source was not only used by Agapius and Michael, but the section on the early Islamic period was also used by the Greek

Pines noted that Agapius himself claimed that his own chronicle was based on the Syriac chronicle of Theophilus of Edessa.⁸ This claim is confirmed by the fact that Agapius' chronicle, which begins with creation, breaks off around 780, just before Theophilus' death, rather than continuing until Agapius' own time in the tenth century. Michael the Syrian's chronicle broadly parallels Agapius' chronicle for the same period from creation to about 780, with the two chronicles being particularly close for the period from the first Muslim conquests of the Roman Near East to about 780.⁹ Michael the Syrian claimed that he directly used the chronicle of Dionysius of Tellmahre (Monophysite patriarch of Antioch 818–848) for the period 582–843. However, in the preface to Dionysius' chronicle, which Michael copied *verbatim* and included in his own chronicle, Dionysius himself acknowledged that he drew on the work of Theophilus of Edessa.¹⁰ This confirms that Theophilus was the major source for Michael's and Agapius' coverage of the period ca. 582–ca. 780. One cannot necessarily conclude, however, that Agapius' and Michael's Testimonia likewise derive from Theophilus' chronicle, Agapius using it directly and Michael using it indirectly by means of Dionysius' chronicle: the Testimonia of Agapius and Michael appear in their respective accounts of the first century, while Dionysius' chronicle apparently only covered events beginning in 582.¹¹ Moreover, another Syriac chronicle that certainly used Dionysius' chronicle, the *Chronicle to 1234*, does not closely follow either Agapius or Michael for the first century, and it entirely lacks a Testimonium.¹² This indicates that

chronicler Theophanes, and the anonymous author of the Syriac *Chronicle to 1234*. Parallels for the same period in Bar Hebraeus' chronicle are explained by his direct use of Michael's chronicle.

- 8 Agapius, *Kitab al-Unwan* 2.2 [240]. Edition used is *Kitab al-Unwan. Histoire universelle* (ed. A. Vasiliev; PO 5, 7, 8, 11; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1910, 1912, 1913, 1915).
- 9 The close resemblance between events reported by Agapius and those reported by Michael for the period from the first Muslim conquests of the Roman Near East to the second half of the eighth century indicates that Michael and Agapius depended almost exclusively on Theophilus of Edessa for this period. The reliance on only one main source for the early Islamic period is not surprising given the complete cessation of Greek history writing in the period ca. 630–ca. 810 (M. Whitby, 'Greek Historical Writing after Procopius', *Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* [ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad; Princeton: Darwin, 1992] 66–77; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 538–41), and significant reduction in Syriac history writing in the same period (Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 409). In contrast, for the late antique Roman period Michael's chronicle used numerous different Greek and Syriac histories.
- 10 Michael, *Chron.* 10.20 [378]. The edition used is *Michel le Syrien: Chronique* (ed. J.-B. Chabot; 4 vols.; Paris, 1899, 1901, 1905, 1910; reprint Brussels: Culture et civilization, 1963).
- 11 Robert Hoyland has questioned whether Theophilus of Edessa's original chronicle began with creation, as Agapius' and Michael's chronicles do, suggesting rather that in imitation of classicizing histories it only covered a limited and relatively recent period (Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 406–7).
- 12 The edition of the *Chronicle to 1234* consulted is *Anonymi auctoris ad A.C. 1234 pertinens* (ed. J.-B. Chabot; CSCO 109; Louvain: Peeters, 1937). One reason this chronicle does not closely

Agapius and Michael may have independently included an earlier chronicle covering the first century that was appended to Agapius' version of Theophilus of Edessa' chronicle, and to Michael's version of Dionysius of Tellmahre's chronicle, but that was not appended to the *Chronicle of 1234*'s version of Dionysius' chronicle. It has been suggested that a likely author of such a hypothetical earlier chronicle might be the Syriac scholar and chronicler James of Edessa (d. ca. 708).¹³

Agapius dedicated his chronicle to a certain Abu Musa 'Isa, son of Husayn, about whom nothing further is apparently known.¹⁴ Under the influence of an inadequate understanding about Muslim patronage of the translation of Syriac and Greek texts into Arabic, it has been assumed that Abu Musa 'Isa was a Muslim who had patronized Agapius' translation of Theophilus' chronicle.¹⁵ However, what is known about the translation movement of Greek texts into Arabic in the period 750–1200 casts some doubt on the idea that Agapius' chronicle was addressed to a Muslim patron. For although Muslim elites of the Abbasid period sometimes employed Syriac-speaking Christians to translate Greek and Syriac scientific, medical and philosophical works into Arabic, they showed very little interest in Greek or Syriac historical texts, and are not known to have had such texts translated.¹⁶ The general lack of Muslim interest in Greek or Syriac historical texts

follow either Michael or Agapius for its treatment of the period from creation to the first century is that it relied heavily on the Syriac text known as the *Cave of Treasures*; the common elements that it does share with Agapius' and Michael's early material can be attributed largely to the mutual use of Eusebius' *Chronicon* or intermediary sources that used it.

¹³ Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus*, 39. One reason for favoring James of Edessa is that Michael claims that James made an abridgement of all the sources that he used that covered creation to the time of Heraclius (Michael the Syrian *Praef. apud* Chabot, *Chronique*, 1.2). This abridgement should probably be identified with James' adaptation of Eusebius of Caesarea's *Chronicon* (Michael the Syrian *Chron.* 7.2 [127–28] *apud* Chabot, *Chronique*, 2.253–5). Moreover, James of Edessa is frequently cited in the early part of Michael's chronicle covering creation to the first century, while Theophilus of Edessa is never cited there. That James' chronicle originally covered the period before Constantine is apparently also proven by extant fragmentary excerpts (E. W. Brooks, 'The Chronological Canon of James of Edessa', *ZDMG* 53 [1899] 261–327, esp. 263).

¹⁴ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 441.

¹⁵ Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus*, 190.

¹⁶ However, some Muslim historians showed an interest in Arabic Christian chronicles, presumably because their language made them more accessible than Greek or Syriac histories. Al-Mas'udi, for example, apparently knew of Agapius' work (Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 441). Lack of interest in Greek histories and language barriers probably also account for the fact that Josephus' original Greek works were neither read by Muslims nor translated into Arabic in the Middle Ages, while during the same period the medieval Hebrew adaptation of Josephus' works, known as the *Josippon*, was translated into Arabic and known to some medieval Muslims (Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus*, 60).

makes it more likely that Agapius translated his chronicle for a fellow Christian than for a Muslim patron. By the tenth century the older languages of Syriac and Coptic were losing ground among many Middle Eastern Christians to Arabic, so it is hardly surprising that Agapius should have chosen to recast an older Syriac source, namely the original chronicle of Theophilus, into an Arabic version that would be understood by his co-religionists.¹⁷ The probability that Agapius translated Theophilus' chronicle for the benefit of Arabic-speaking Christians rather than for Arabic-speaking Muslims calls into question the idea, suggested by one reviewer of Pines' monograph, that the distinctive elements of Agapius' Testimonium can be explained by Agapius' desire to shape the text in response to an 'Islamic environment', which is an idea that can be questioned on other grounds as well.¹⁸

If, as is probable, Agapius and Michael were both dependent for their Testimonia on a Syriac source, whether that source was Theophilus of Edessa or some other Syriac chronicler, such as James of Edessa, then Michael's Syriac Testimonium is much more likely to reflect this original Syriac version of the Testimonium more closely than Agapius' Arabic Testimonium, which at best can only be a translation of a Syriac original, and most likely is only a paraphrase of this Syriac original. In addition, the general nature of Michael's and Agapius' chronicles confirms that Michael's Testimonium is much more likely to reflect this original Syriac Testimonium than Agapius' version of the Testimonium. For Agapius' relatively brief chronicle is clearly an abbreviated paraphrase of a longer source, while the section of Michael's chronicle that parallels Agapius' chronicle, from creation to the eighth century, is much longer and it frequently quotes entire sources *verbatim*. This suggests that Agapius' Testimonium was also a paraphrase rather than a *verbatim* quotation of its original Syriac source.

The Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica*

As already indicated, Pines argued on the basis of common vocabulary that Michael's Testimonium must have been taken directly or indirectly from the Syriac translation of Eusebius of Caesarea's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which quotes the Testimonium Flavianum *verbatim* (*HE* 1.11. 7–8).¹⁹ Pines' argument about

17 The main Coptic history for the early Islamic period, the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, was likewise first recast into Arabic in the tenth century (Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 446).

18 The reviewer who suggested this was Ernst Bammel, 'A New Variant form of the Testimonium Flavianum', *Expository Times* 85 (1974) 145–7. For a critique of this idea, see Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus*, 190–92.

19 The Testimonium from the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* in the appendix is a collation of both Ms. A and Ms. B as edited by William Wright and Norman McLean (William Wright and

vocabulary is confirmed by comparing this vocabulary with the independent translation of the Testimonium appearing in the Syriac translation of Eusebius's *Theophania*.²⁰ Among the more salient common characteristics shared by the Testimonia of the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Michael the Syrian, but distinct from the Testimonium of the Syriac *Theophania* are the following:

Both Michael and the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* translate ἄνδρα of the Greek Testimonium's phrase εἶγε ἄνδρα αὐτὸν λέγειν χρή ('if it is necessary to call him a man') with the word ܐܢܘܫܐ ('man'), while *Theophania* uses the word ܐܢܘܢܐ ('human being'). Both Michael and the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* use a form of ܐܠܘܚܐ ('to make disciples') to represent the Greek Testimonium's ἐπηγάγετο, while *Theophania* uses ܥܘܕ ('gather'). Both Michael and the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* use ܥܘܠܡܐ ('nations') to translate the Greek Testimonium's τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ, while *Theophania* uses ܥܘܠܡܐ ('pagans'). Both Michael and the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* use the idiom ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ('imposed on him the putting of the cross on the head'), while *Theophania* uses the idiom ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ('put on his head a cross [or stake]'), where even a different word for cross is employed. Both Michael and the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* write ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ('after three days') while *Theophania* writes ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ('on the third day').²¹ Both Michael and the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* translate the Greek Testimonium's οὐκ ἐπαύσαντο οἱ τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαπήσαντες as 'those who loved him did not cease from loving him' (ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ), while *Theophania* translates it as 'those who previously loved him were not silent (ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ ܥܘܕ)'. Both Michael and the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* write ܥܘܕ for the word φῶλον, which is used as a collective for Christians in the Greek Testimonium, while *Theophania* writes ܥܘܕ (from Greek γένος) for the same word.

The comparison of Michael's vocabulary with that of the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* confirms that Michael's Testimonium must derive ultimately from an edition of the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica*, as Pines intimated by arguing that

Norman McLean, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1898] viii-ix, 48). These editors followed Ms. B entirely for the text of the Testimonium, and they relegated the readings of Ms. A to the apparatus on the grounds that Ms. B is generally of better quality. However, as even they note in the apparatus, Ms. A occasionally presents better readings, for example, in placing the final stop in the correct position.

²⁰ For an accessible text of the Testimonium appearing in the *Theophania*, which is taken from Samuel Lee's 1842 edition of the work, see Pines, *Arabic Version*, 24 n. 106.

²¹ Agapius also refers to Jesus appearing after three days rather than on the third day, and so does Pseudo-Hegesippus, *De excidio Hierosolymitano* 2.12. However, this form is common among Christians, and appears in most manuscripts of Mark 8.31, so it is hardly a clear indication of contact between Pseudo-Hegesippus and the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The use of 'after' by the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Pseudo-Hegesippus may have been prompted independently by the unusual Greek: τρίτην ἔχων ἡμέραν.

the two texts ‘reflect the same translation’.²² Confirming this is the fact that Jean-Baptiste Chabot, the first Western scholar to edit Michael’s manuscript, had already long before observed that material in Michael’s account of the first century was dependent on a source that had quoted excerpts of Josephus from the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* rather than translate them directly from Josephus’ works. For Chabot supplemented and corrected a quotation by Eusebius (*HE* 1.8.5–7) of Josephus’ works (*Ant.* 17.168–170; *Bell.* 1.656), which appears in Michael’s account of the first century, with readings of the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica*.²³ Moreover, Michael’s chronicle states clearly that this particular quotation was actually taken from Eusebius’ works rather than directly from Josephus’ works.²⁴ A close comparison of this passage from Michael’s chronicle with Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.8.5–7 confirms that the former text quotes from the latter text.²⁵

Common elements in the Testimonia of Agapius and Michael

As already noted, Pines had little interest in Michael’s *Testimonium per se*; his attention to it was stimulated mainly by the fact that it contains a few distinctive elements in common with Agapius’ version of the *Testimonium* but lacking in the *textus receptus Testimonium*, which led him to argue that Michael’s text reflected a mixture of the *textus receptus Testimonium* and Agapius’ original Syriac source. However, it is much more probable that these distinctive common elements simply reflect the nature of the literal translation of the *Testimonium* that was taken from the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* by the common source that both Agapius and Michael followed, the former loosely and the latter literally. The most significant common elements are that both Agapius and Michael qualify the *Testimonium*’s statement about Jesus being the Messiah, and that both make a more explicit reference to Jesus’ death than the *textus receptus Testimonium*.

Regarding the first point, Agapius writes of Jesus that he was ‘perhaps’ the Messiah, and Michael writes that Jesus was ‘thought to be the Messiah’ (ܠܦܘܬܘܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܢܫܘܥܐ). Pines noted that the latter sentence is almost exactly the same as that appearing in Jerome’s translation of the *Testimonium*, namely *credebatur esse Christus*, and he pointed out the implausibility of Jerome’s translation influencing Michael since Latin and Syriac writers did not read one another’s works in ancient or early medieval times except through the medium of Greek translation. Since it is scarcely credible that the writers could have independently modified the *Testimonium* in this same way,

²² Pines, *Arabic Testimonium*, 27.

²³ Chabot, *Chronique*, 1.138 n. 2.

²⁴ Michael the Syrian *Chron.* 5.10 [88–89] *apud* Chabot, *Chronique*, 1.137, 139.

²⁵ Chabot, *Chronique*, 4.88 column 1 (right to left), lines 10–35 // Wright and McLean, *Ecclesiastical History*, 39, lines 15–19; 40, lines 1–7 and lines 13–19.

their readings must reflect an original Greek Testimonium reading something like 'he was believed to be the Christ'. Jerome's translation reading *credebatur esse Christus* is highly significant because the earliest manuscripts of his *De viris illustribus*, the work in which his translation of the Testimonium appears, date to the sixth or seventh century; thus they are several centuries older than the earliest Greek manuscripts of Book 18 of Josephus' *Antiquities* or of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*. It has already been shown that Michael's Testimonium was clearly based on a version of the text taken from the Syriac translation of *Historia Ecclesiastica*. It is highly likely, although less certain, that Jerome's translation of the Testimonium was taken from the Greek *Historia Ecclesiastica*, rather than directly from a copy of Josephus' *Antiquities*. For Jerome's *De viris illustribus* is elsewhere highly dependent on Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

In addition, a further although less conclusive indication that Michael is unlikely to have forged 'he was thought to be the Messiah' *ex nihilo* is that the masculine singular passive (*ethpe'al*) participle ܦܘܠܘܬܐ is unusually skeptical for a medieval Christian bishop like Michael to use for Jesus' Messianic status. The skeptical connotation of ܦܘܠܘܬܐ is indicated by its use in the Syriac NT at Luke 3.23 to translate the Greek ἐνομιζέτο, and at Heb 12.11, where the Greek reads δοκεῖ.²⁶ In the passage from Luke the connotation is that Joseph was merely supposed to be Jesus' father but that this was not necessarily true. The passage from Hebrews openly states that appearances are deceiving. An original Greek Testimonium reading ἐνομιζέτο, as in Luke 3.23, instead of the *textus receptus* ὁ Χριστός οὗτος ἦν would not only account for Michael's ܦܘܠܘܬܐ and Jerome's *credebatur*, it would also explain why Origen, who was familiar with Book 18 of *Antiquities*, argued that Josephus did not believe in Jesus 'as the Christ'.²⁷ A reading like ἐνομιζέτο would also explain why Pseudo-Hegesippus, the author of *De excidio Hierosolymitano*, an anonymous Latin adaptation of Josephus' works composed around 370, does not allude to the Testimonium's statement ὁ Χριστός οὗτος ἦν, even though he exaggerates the positive connotations of other parts of the Testimonium. In addition, Pseudo-Hegesippus' sentence *plerique tamen Judaeorum, gentilium plurimi crediderunt in eum* (*De excidio* 2.12), looks very much like a positive paraphrase of the text that Jerome translated more literally as *plurimos quoque tamen de Judais quam de gentilibus sui habuit sectores et credebatur esse Christus*.

One other possible resemblance between Michael's and Jerome's versions of this particular sentence, which was not considered by Pines, should be noted. The

26 G. A. Kiraz, *A Computer-generated Concordance to the Syriac New Testament* (6 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1993) 3. 1923–24.

27 This was already pointed out by Pines, *Arabic Version*, 65, and reiterated by Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus*, 41–2. The relevant texts of Origen are *Contra Celsum* 1.47, and *Commentarium in Matthaeum* 10.17.

or Latin translation of the Testimonium. It is unlikely, therefore, that this amplified reference to Jesus' death after his condemnation by Pilate can be part of the original Testimonium.³⁰ Pines was puzzled by this feature of the Testimonia in the two Semitic-language chronicles because he knew of no doctrinal reasons why a Syriac writer between the late fourth or early fifth century, when the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* was translated, and the time of Michael the Syrian should have added a more explicit reference to Jesus' death than that contained in the *textus receptus* Testimonium.³¹ In contrast, it has been argued that this amplified reference to Jesus' death could have been consciously or unconsciously added by a Christian Syriac writer or copyist of that period in reaction to Muslims' traditional interpretation of Quran 4:156–159, an interpretation that consists of a denial that Jesus died on the cross.³² Thus the amplified reference to Jesus' death in Agapius' and Michael's chronicles could be viewed as evidence that their common Syriac source dates to sometime after the Muslim conquest of the Roman Near East. This hypothesis is, of course, chronologically consistent with the hypothesis that either Theophilus of Edessa or James of Edessa was responsible for excerpting a Testimonium from the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and including it in the historical compilation that stands behind Michael's and Agapius' treatments of the first century.

In addition, there is one other Syriac translation of the Testimonium, which was overlooked by Pines, that is of some relevance to the question of why Michael's and Agapius' Testimonia both contain an amplified reference to Jesus' death. This Testimonium is included among a long list of quotations, mainly from patristic works, in a late eighth-century or ninth-century *florilegium* that is catalogued among the British Museum's Syriac manuscripts.³³ Its lemma explicitly

30 Pseudo-Hegesippus' *De excidio Hierosolymitano* 2.12, which contains a loose paraphrase rather than a literal translation of the Testimonium, writes *ne mors quidem eius vel fidei vel gratiae finem imposuit, et apparuerit discipulis suis post triduum mortis suae vivens iterum*, and also *principes synagoguae quem ad mortem comprehenderant*. Here there are so many references to Jesus' death that one suspects that Pseudo-Hegesippus was repeating the word to vilify Jesus' executioners rather than that he was paraphrasing an original version of the Testimonium that contained an explicit reference to Jesus' death.

31 Pines, *Arabic Version*, 30.

32 Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus*, 191–2.

33 This *florilegium* is listed as document dccclx [Add. 12154] in William Wright, *A Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum* (3 vols.; London: British Museum, 1870–72) 2.976–89. That a Syriac compiler should have extracted a literal quotation of the Testimonium from a larger work like Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* and included it with extracts from authors other than Josephus is not surprising given that there are several Greek manuscripts that contain a Testimonium included with extracts from other authors (Heinz Schreckenberg, *Flavius-Josephus-tradition in Antike und Mittelalter* (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 30, 34–5, 37.

states that it was taken from Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*,³⁴ and this attribution is confirmed by the fact that its basic vocabulary, like that of Michael's Testimonium, is unquestionably the vocabulary of the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica*. In fact, William Wright collated this version of the Testimonium with the manuscripts of the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* for his edition of this text. He gave the identifying letter C to this Testimonium, following the letters A and B, which had been given respectively to a manuscript of the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* that is explicitly dated to 462, and a manuscript believed on paleographical grounds to date to the sixth century. Wright included Ms. C's distinct readings in the apparatus of his edition.³⁵ From this it can be seen that Ms. C reads ܠܡܘܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ adding the phrase ܠܡܘܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ('to death') so that the whole phrase could be translated as 'Pilate condemned him to death by crucifixion'. In other words, like Michael's and Agapius' Testimonia, Ms. C. also contains a more explicit reference to Jesus' death after his condemnation by Pilate than the *textus receptus* Testimonium. Remarkably, Pines, although ignorant of Ms. C's distinctive reading here, conjectured on the basis of Agapius' and Michael's Testimonia that the original Syriac version of the Testimonium used by Agapius added something similar to Ms. C's ܠܡܘܬܐ, either ܠܡܘܬܐ, or the variant ܠܡܘܬܐ. Pines rendered this hypothetical text 'Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die'.³⁶ The fact that both Ms. C and Michael's Testimonium contain an amplified reference to Jesus' death raises a broader question about the two texts' relationship. Significantly, both Ms. C and Michael's Testimonium share a number of much more minor similarities, as compared to the readings of Ms. A, and especially of Ms. B, the manuscript that was favored by Wright for his text of the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Specifically, Michael and Ms. C both omit the word ܠܡ entirely in the first sentence, while this word does appear in Ms. B after the words ܡܫܝܚܐ and ܕܡܫܝܚܐ; Michael and Ms. C both omit the word ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ('again'), which appears before ܡܫܝܚܐ; Michael and Ms. C both read ܡܫܝܚܐ in the second to last sentence before the word ܡܫܝܚܐ instead of just ܡܫܝܚܐ as in manuscripts A and B; and Michael and Ms. C both add the word ܡܫܝܚܐ (from Greek γάρ) between the word ܡܫܝܚܐ and ܕܡܫܝܚܐ.

The mutual omission of the word ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ('again') in both Ms. C and Michael's Testimonium suggests a further explanation of why both texts might include an amplified reference to Jesus' death. For this word corresponds to the *πάλιν* of the Greek Testimonium. This word, used in combination with ζῶν ('alive again'), is the only clear indication in the *textus receptus* Testimonium that Jesus had actually died from his crucifixion. It would not be surprising if Theophilus of Edessa,

34 Wright, *Catalogue*, 2.983.

35 Wright and McLean, *Ecclesiastical History*, 48, vii.

36 Pines, *Arabic Version*, 32 and n. 126.

or James of Edessa, or whoever was the original source for Michael and Ms. C, having seen a version of the text lacking ܘܥܠܐ ('again'), consciously or unconsciously added an explicit reference to Jesus' death by way of clarification, particularly if he had been exposed to the argumentation of Muslims that Jesus had not actually died on the cross.

The mutual agreement of the minor variants in Ms. C with Michael's text suggests that the manuscript traditions of Michael and Ms. C share a common provenance. This common provenance is most likely Edessa: Michael's manuscript was located there when it was first brought to the attention of Western scholars at the end of the nineteenth century,³⁷ and the British Museum *florilegium* that contains Ms. C was, according to its fragmentary colophon, apparently written for the benefit of a monk named John of Edessa.³⁸ Adding weight to the hypothesis of an Edessene provenance, is the likelihood, already discussed, that Michael's Testimonium goes back, at least at some stage, to the historical compilations of either Theophilus of Edessa or James of Edessa. Another characteristic of the Syriac *florilegium* that might indicate a common provenance with Michael's chronicle is the fact that it contains extracts from the writings of James of Edessa and his disciple John of Litarb,³⁹ both of whose historical writings were used to construct the first part of Michael's chronicle.⁴⁰

If distinctive variants in the Testimonia of Michael's chronicle and the British Museum's *florilegium* might explain one unusual aspect of Agapius' Testimonium, namely its explicit reference to Jesus' death, can other distinctive aspects of Agapius' text be explained from other characteristics of the four extant Testimonia that are known to derive from the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica*, namely the Testimonia of Ms. A, Ms. B, Ms. C, and Michael? Pines himself noted that the word ܠܥܘܠܐ, used by Michael and the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* to qualify Jesus' deeds, does not necessarily connote something miraculous, as is often assumed of the Greek Testimonium's term παραδόξων ἔργων. As in the case of Josephus' use of the term παραδόξων ἔργων at *Ant.* 12.63, which refers to King Ptolemy's remarkable but not really miraculous deeds, the word ܠܥܘܠܐ can connote something closer to fine or glorious than to something miraculous. Pines judged it plausible that Agapius could have paraphrased ܠܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ('doer of glorious works') with a sentence that does not clearly refer to

37 Chabot, *Chronique*, 1.xxxvii.

38 Wright, *Catalogue*, 2.989.

39 Wright, *Catalogue*, 2.984, 988.

40 Chabot, *Chronique*, 1.xxv–xxviii, 20. It is suggestive that both of these writers are cited in the first part of Michael's chronicle, where the Testimonium appeared, while Theophilus of Edessa, originally favored by Pines as the ultimate source of Agapius' Testimonium, does not appear in this part of Michael's chronicle.

Jesus' miraculous deeds, but rather merely characterizes Jesus' conduct as being fine or virtuous.⁴¹

It is possible that another distinctive aspect of Agapius' *Testimonium*, namely its lack of a reference to Jewish leaders' role in Jesus' death, can also be explained by the nature of its Syriac source. As Pines himself noted, Michael's manuscript appears to differ from the standard Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* in reading not ܠܗܘܢ ܘܢܘܨܘܢܝܗܘܢ ܕܡܢ ܩܝܡܘܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ('upon the testimony of the principal men of our nation, Pilate condemned him to the cross') but rather ܠܗܘܢ ܘܢܘܨܘܢܝܗܘܢ ܕܡܢ ܩܝܡܘܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܠܐ, which can be translated, 'but *not* according to testimony of the principal men of our nation'. This difference derives from the fact that either Michael or his copyist or his source has apparently confused ܡܠܐ (accusative of 'him') in the *textus receptus* Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica* with ܠܐ, a form of the word 'not'. Now ܠܐ is clearly an error since the Greek reads αὐτόν. However, a scribal error confusing ܡܠܐ with ܠܐ is orthographically understandable in Syriac, and this error is attested in the earliest layer of the Syriac tradition, for it also appears in Ms. A, the oldest extant manuscript of the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The antiquity of the confusion between ܡܠܐ and ܠܐ in the Syriac tradition indicates that it could well have been Michael's source, rather than Michael himself or a later copyist, who confused the two words. The significance of this confusion between ܡܠܐ and ܠܐ for our inquiry is that it appears to connect the *Testimonium*'s sentence about the Jewish leaders' testimony not to Pilate's execution of Jesus, but rather to his being the Messiah in Ms. A, or to his being thought to be the Messiah in Michael's manuscript. And if Agapius also originally read in his source a Syriac *Testimonium* that appeared to read 'he was thought to be the Messiah, but *not* according to the testimony of the principal men among our nation. Pilate condemned him to death by crucifixion', it might explain why he paraphrased the text in a way that excluded a reference to Jewish leaders' role in Jesus' death.⁴²

One final overlooked variation in Ms. C should be noted. At the end of its sentence about the prophets having said many things about Jesus, Ms. C adds

41 Pines, *Arabic Version*, 34. Pines translated Agapius' sentence here as 'his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous'.

42 Michael may have consciously or unconsciously made up for the lack of a clear reference to the Jewish leaders' role in Jesus' death in his manuscript, caused by the apparent substitution of ܠܐ for ܡܠܐ, by adding the word ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ('because of this') between the sentence about the Jewish leaders and the sentence about Pilate's condemnation. Thus his *Testimonium* reads, 'he was thought to be the Messiah. But *not* according to the leaders of the nation. *Because of this*, Pilate condemned him to the cross, and he died.' The addition of ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ links the Jewish leaders' attitudes to Pilate's actions. There can be no doubt that Michael, as an uncritical medieval Christian reader of the Gospels, would have believed that Pilate's condemnation of Jesus was indeed linked to the Jewish leaders' attitude towards Jesus.

pendently supported by Jerome's very early translation of the Testimonium, and because it can readily explain Origen's claim that Josephus did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Therefore the most important aspect of Agapius' text is its reading that Jesus was 'perhaps' the Messiah, because this reading lends weight to the hypothesis that Michael's qualification of Jesus' Messianic status was based on an older exemplar of the Testimonium rather than being created by Michael *ex nihilo*. This study has also argued that some of the other elements of Agapius' Testimonium that Pines identified as more neutral and less Christian-sounding than the *textus receptus* Testimonium can also be explained by the distinctive readings of the Syriac exemplar of *Historia Ecclesiastica* upon which Agapius' Testimonium was based. However, in contrast to the phrase 'he was thought to be the Messiah', these readings are not clearly supported by any early Greek or Latin translation of the Testimonium, such as that of Jerome; indeed, some have been shown to be simple errors of transmission.

In arguing that Agapius' Testimonium was closer to Josephus' original passage about Jesus than any extant Testimonium, Pines followed a long line of earlier scholars who assumed that Josephus' original passage about Jesus must have been very different from the *textus receptus* Testimonium, which these same scholars assumed to have been substantially rewritten by a Christian forger.⁴³ In contrast, in arguing that Michael's Testimonium, which is generally close to the *textus receptus* Testimonium and which has clearly been taken from a recension of the Syriac *Historia Ecclesiastica*, is more authentic than Agapius' Testimonium, this study implies that the *textus receptus* Testimonium is much closer to the passage that Josephus originally wrote about Jesus than is often assumed. Indeed, the evidence of Michael the Syrian's Testimonium, used in conjunction with the evidence of Jerome's Testimonium, indicates that the only major alteration⁴⁴ that has been made to Josephus' original passage about Jesus is the alteration of the phrase 'he was thought to be the Messiah' to the *textus receptus* phrase 'he was the Messiah'.

43 The idea that Josephus' original passage about Jesus was substantially altered by a Christian forger dates back to the seventeenth century (Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus*, 132). The idea that the entire Testimonium is a fabrication that was interpolated into *Jewish Antiquities* dates back to the late sixteenth century (p. 93).

44 For a discussion of textual evidence for possible minor alterations to the Testimonium see Alice Whealey, 'Josephus, Eusebius of Caesarea and the Testimonium Flavianum', *Josephus und das Neue Testament* (ed. Christfried Böttrich and Jens Herzer; WUNT 209; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) 73–116, 101–5, esp. 115–16.

ἀγαπησαντες· ἐφάνη γὰρ αὐτοῖς τρίτην ἔχων ἡμέραν πάλιν ζῶν τῶν θεῶν
προφητῶν ταῦτα τε καὶ ἄλλα μυρία περὶ αὐτοῦ θαυμάσια εἰρηκότων.
εἰς ἔτι τε νῦν τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀπὸ τοῦδε ὀνομασμένον οὐκ ἐπέλιπε τὸ φύλον.

Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Iudaicae* 18.63–64