



earlier authors who wrote about their mythical pagan gods? After all, Paul never met Jesus and would only have had hearsay evidence to go on, apart from his alleged 'Road to Damascus' experience.

The Romans were renowned for keeping careful records of all their activities, including executions by crucifixion, but there is no mention of a man called Jesus being executed or tried by Pontius Pilate. Nearly 30 other Roman writers and renowned historians who lived in the first century C.E. and who kept meticulous records make no mention of Jesus either. Philo was an eminent Jewish author who lived at the same time as the supposed Jesus and wrote about 50 works that still survive today. They deal with history, philosophy and religion and tell us much about Pontius Pilate, yet they make absolutely no mention of Jesus. Philo's contemporary, Justus of Tiberias, was a Jew who lived near Capernaum, where Jesus was often said to have stayed. He wrote history that began with Moses and extended to his own times, but again gave no mention of Jesus.

The only person to make direct reference was the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, who was a younger contemporary of the apostle Paul. Jo-

sephus wrote two comprehensive works entitled *The Jewish Wars* and *The Antiquities of the Jews*. He makes mention of Jesus the Messiah in paragraphs 63 and 64, chapter 18 of the latter. For hundreds of years these passages were seized on by Christian historians as conclusive proof that Jesus existed. That is, until scholars began to examine the text a little more critically. No serious scholar now believes that these passages were actually written by Josephus. They have been clearly identified as much later additions and are not of the same writing style as Josephus. Scholars agree that these

passages have suffered at the hands of later Christian interpreters who were anxious to make their Messiah story more convincing. But, of course, even if these words were genuine, they would still only have been hearsay as Josephus was not born until 37 C.E., at least four years after the alleged crucifixion. Moreover, two short paragraphs out of Josephus' entire lifetime's work is a meagre and derisory contribution to the history of someone considered to be the most important person who ever lived.

The Gospels portray Jesus as famous far and wide, a prophet and healer, with great multitudes of people who knew him, including high priests and Roman authorities. Yet not one person records his existence during his lifetime. To illustrate this extraordinary absence of Jesus literature, just imagine going through 20th century writing in search of Winston Churchill but unable to find a single mention of him on earth until you examine the works of authors who put pen to paper 40 years after his death.

Recently, a former preacher friend asked me if I still believed Jesus was the Son of God. I said no and added that I no longer believed he ever existed. He was surprised and asked me if I believed Julius Caesar existed. I

replied yes. He asked why then did I not believe Jesus Christ existed since he was born after Julius Caesar. I explained that there were contemporaneous writings relating to Caesar, coins were minted with his name and image on them and there were numerous statues and busts made during his life which still survive today. For Jesus there is absolutely nothing and

no physical evidence of his existence has ever been found. Although my friend disagreed with me, we still remain friends and he said he would continue to pray that I will, one day, 'return to the Lord'.

Amazingly, the question of

an actual historical Jesus rarely confronts the religious believer. The vast majority just accept it without question. It is, however, extraordinary that not a single historian or philosopher who lived at the alleged time of Jesus ever mentions him. There is no physical evidence to support a historical Jesus: no artefacts, no dwelling, no works of carpentry or self-written manuscripts. All claims about Jesus derive from hearsay accounts written many years after his supposed death. There is simply no credible evidence that a historical Jesus ever existed and until I see some I will continue to remain a doubting Thomas! □

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"Fanaticism was born of three crackpots in a sand-storm" -

Jonathan Miller, on the origins of the three major religions, in *A Brief History of Disbelief*

