

Extra-Biblical sources for Jesus

A semi deep dive in to the early Church
and its Context

9am Class



15 *but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,*

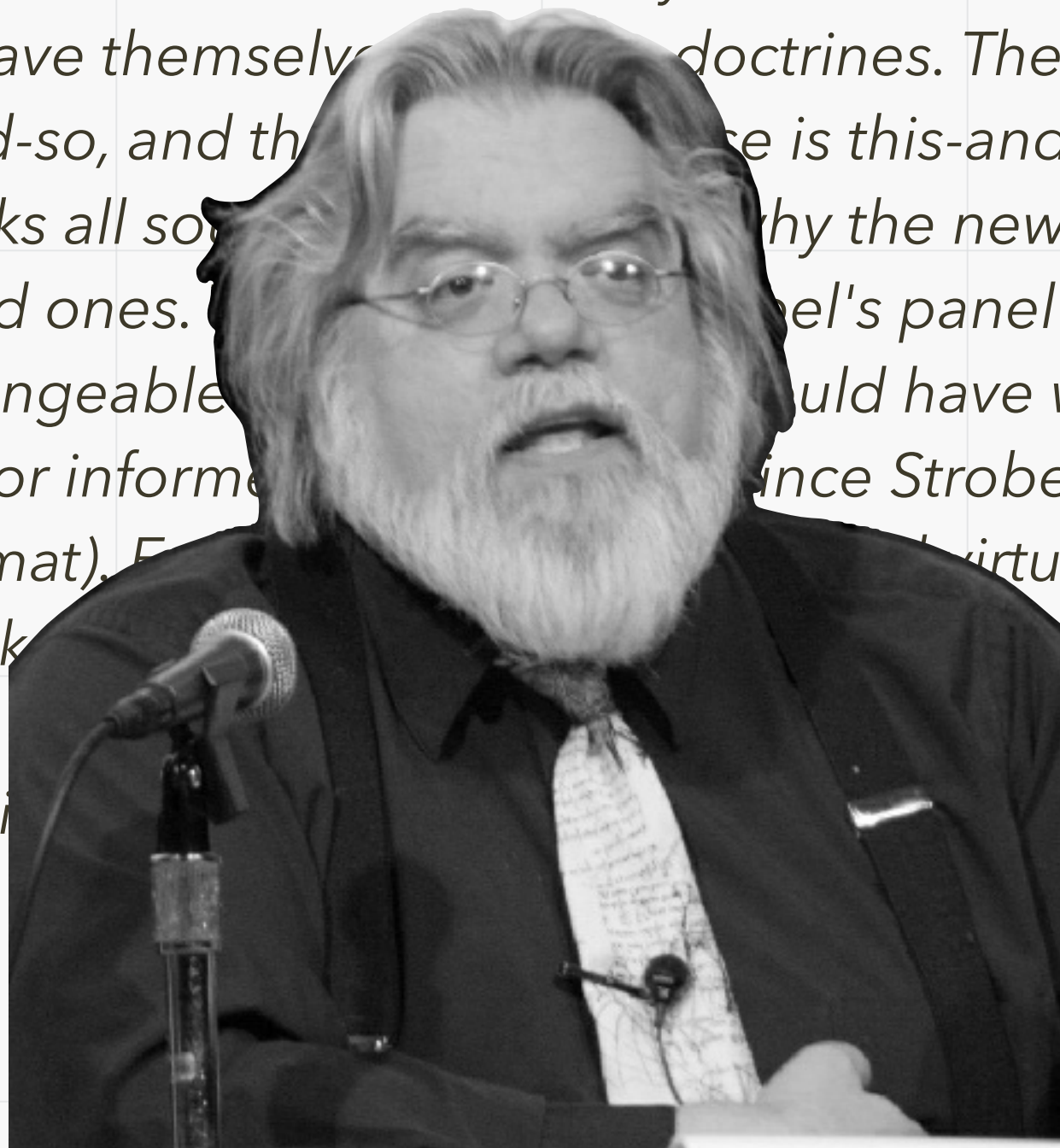
- 1. Peter 3:15

In fact, every debate I have had with evangelicals has reinforced the same conclusion. What has happened, I think, is that the traditional apologetics have now become as fully a part of the evangelical creed as the doctrines they are meant to defend! The apologetics have themselves become doctrines. The official belief, then, is so-and-so, and the official defense is this-and-that. That is why their books all sound the same and why the new ones sound just like the old ones. That is why Lee Strobel's panel of experts are really interchangeable: any one of them could have written any of the chapters (or informed them, I guess, since Strobel maintains a dialogical format). Each and all would have said virtually the same thing when asked the same raft of questions.

- Dr. Robert Price

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- Dr. Robert Price



Overview



.01 NEW TESTAMENT CONTEXT

.02 EXTRA-BIBLICAL SOURCES CHRONOLOGICALLY
.TACITUS (C. 116 AD) - "CASE STUDY"

.JOSEPHUS (C. 37 - 100 AD)

.PLINY THE YOUNGER (C. 112 AD)

.EMPEROR TRAJAN'S REPLY (C. 112 AD)

.SUETONIUS (C. 120 AD)

.MEGGIDO MOSAIC (C. 230 AD)

.03 WHY THIS MATTERS FOR CHRISTIANS

.04 CONCLUSION

01

New Testament context

The NT as Historical Source

- Our earliest and most detailed sources about Jesus
- Paul's letters (50-55 AD): Within 20 years of events
 - 1 Thessalonians (50-51 AD)
 - 1 Corinthians (53-55 AD)

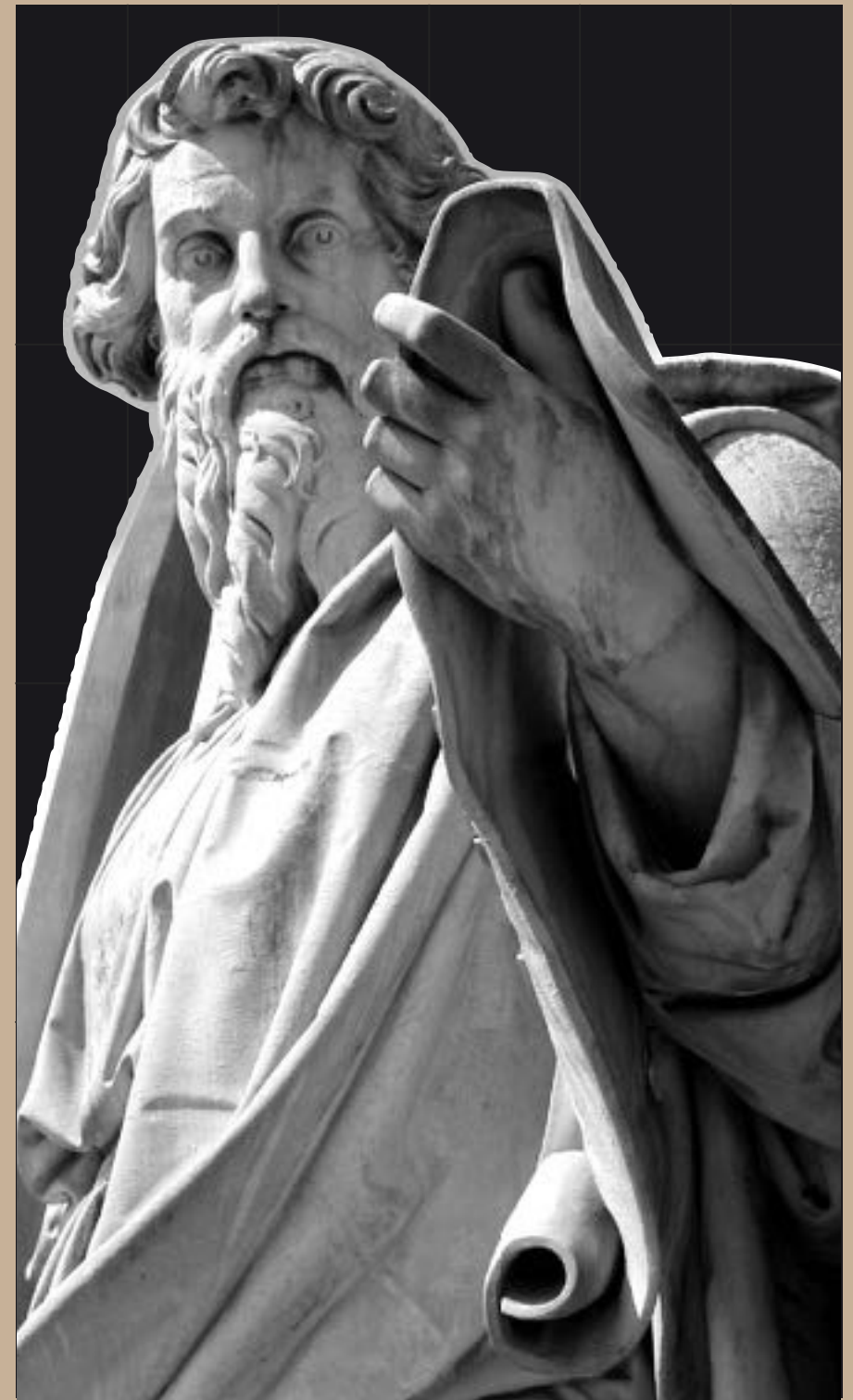
The pietà in the Vatican



01

15

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, **4** that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, **5** and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.



Statue of St. Paul in the Vatican

01

New Testament context



Early Christian Creed

- 1 Corinthians 15: Contains pre-Pauline creed
 - Dated by scholars to within 2-5 years of crucifixion
 - Technical language of "received" and "delivered"
 - Extraordinarily early by historical standards

01 New Testament context

The NT as Historical Source

Historians evaluate ancient documents based on:

- Chronological proximity to events.
- Multiple attestation.
- Internal consistency.



01 New Testament context

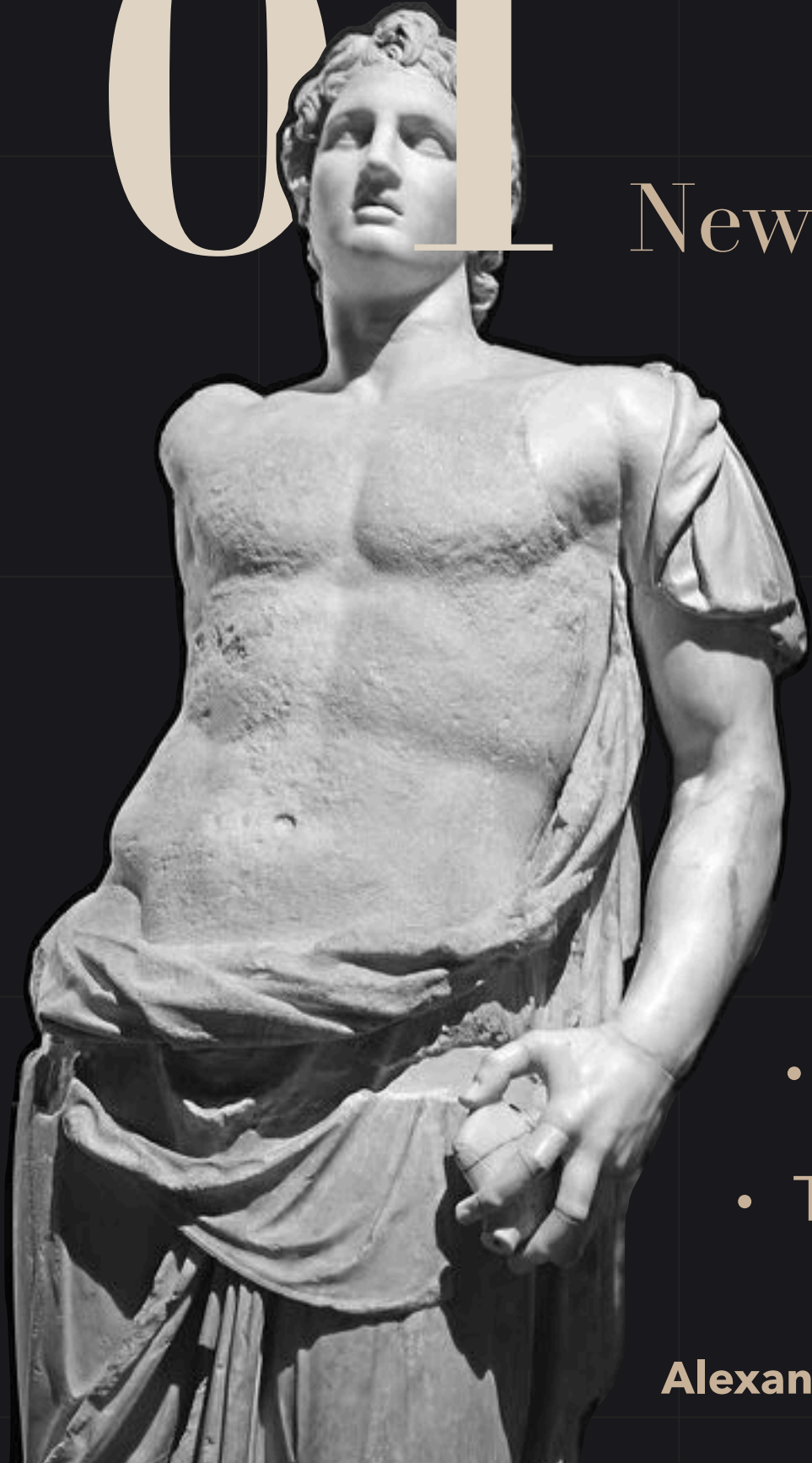
The NT as Historical Source

- The Gospels Include precisely the kind of details that genuine memory preserves.
- specific locations & weather conditions,
- times of day & names of minor characters



01

New Testament context



Comparative Historical Sources

- Jesus: Sources within 20-60 years
- Alexander the Great: 300+ years
- Typical gap for ancient figures: centuries

Alexander the Great

01 New Testament context

The Criterion of Embarrassment

- Disciples' failures and misunderstandings
- Crucifixion: "stumbling block to Jews, foolishness to Gentiles"
- Not the story you would invent



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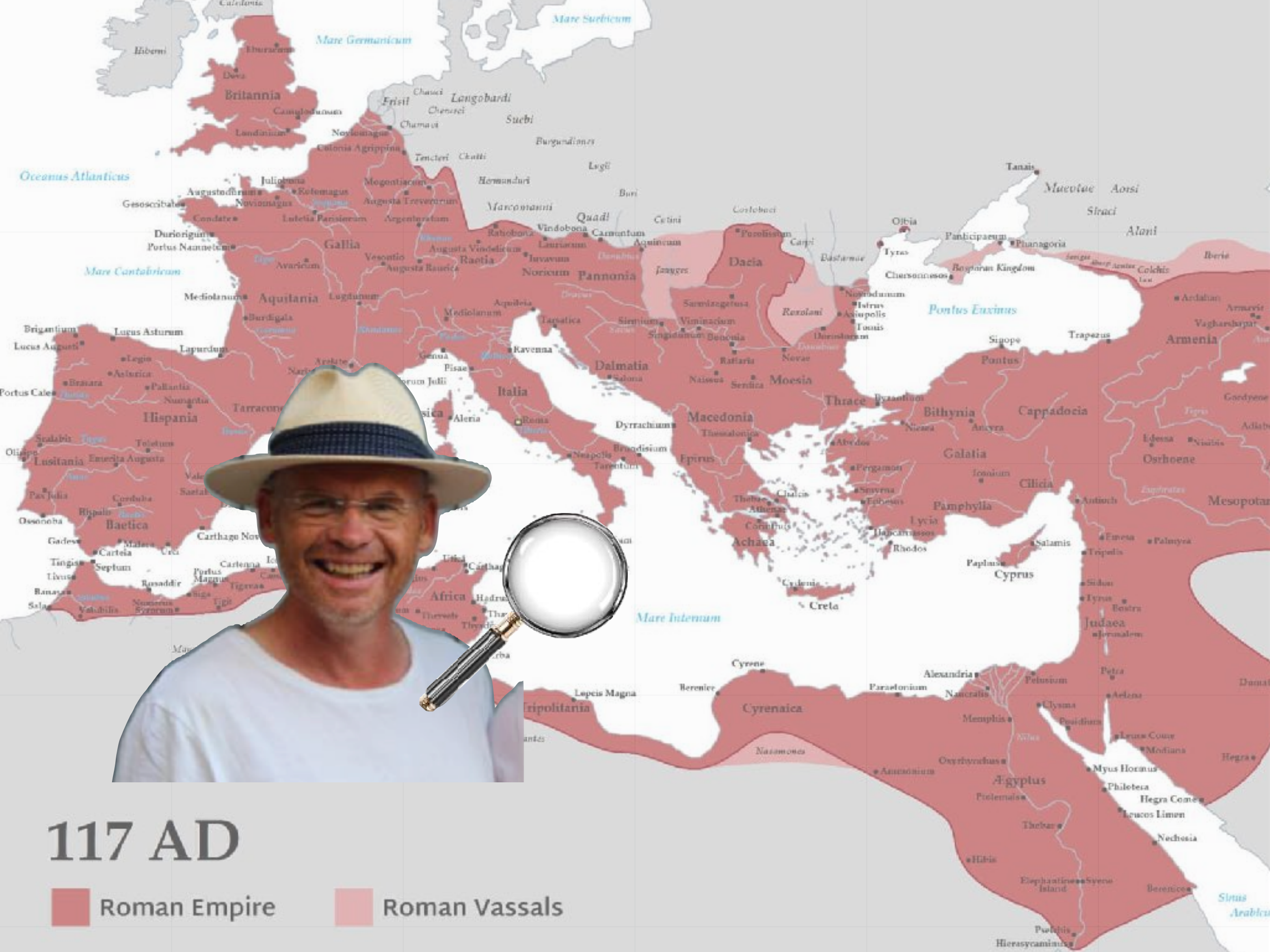
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Putting on the Historians Hat

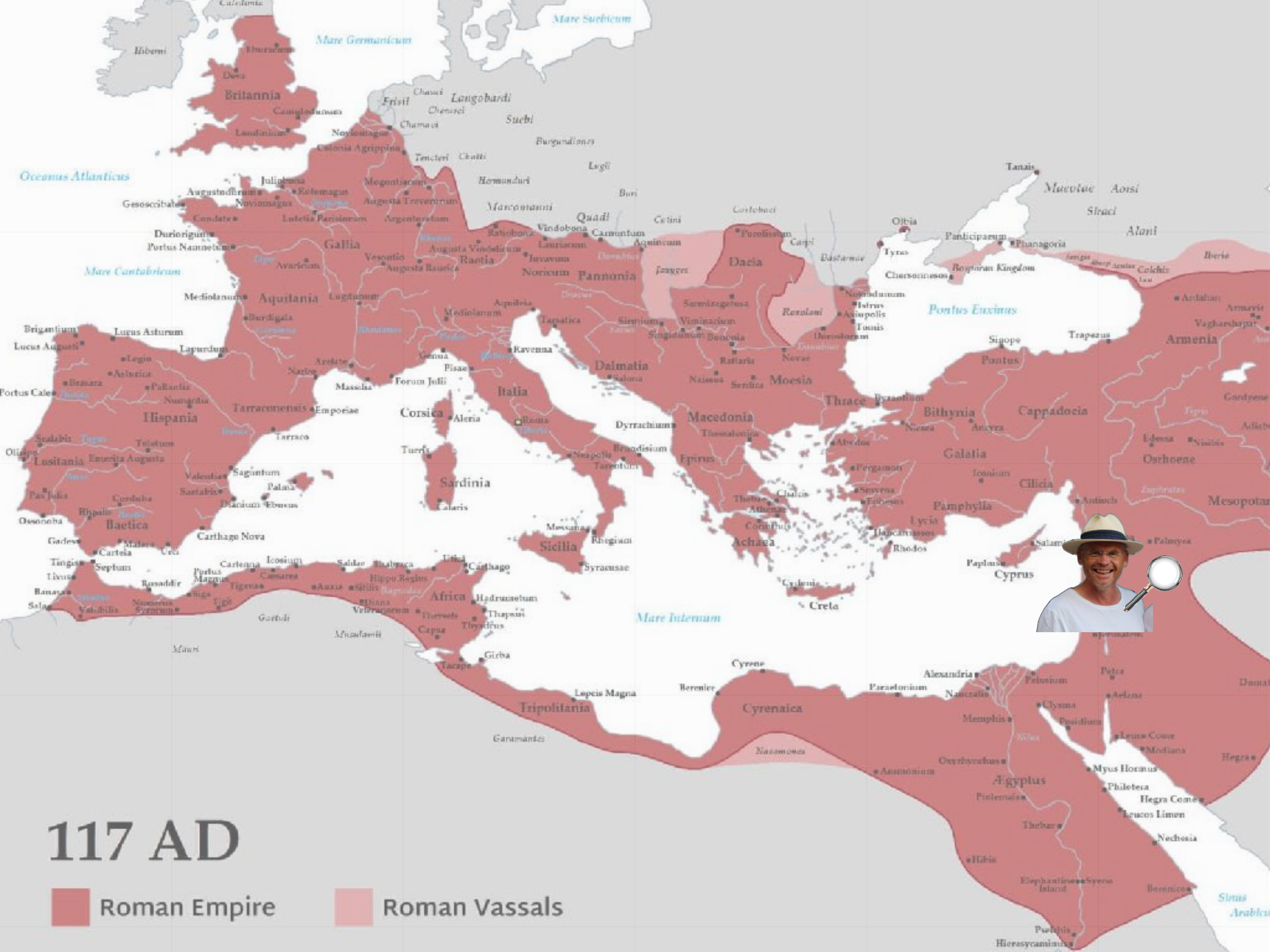




117 AD

Roman Empire

Roman Vassals



117 AD



Roman Empire



Roman Vassals

01 Putting on the Historians Hat



- No printing presses or mass communication



- Writing was done on costly materials like papyrus and parchment

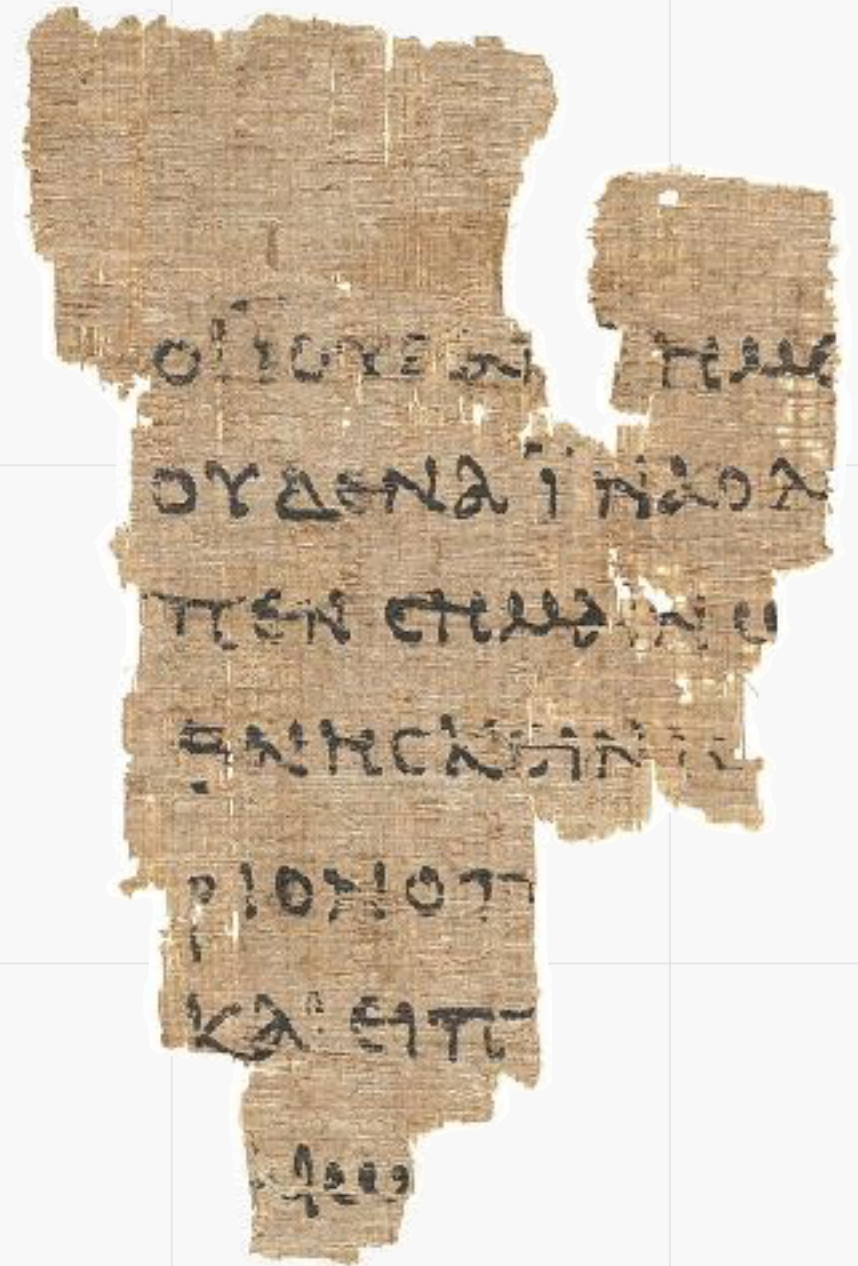


- Only the most significant events were recorded

01

P52

- A small fragment of papyrus containing part of the Gospel of John (18:31-33, 37-38).
- Circa **125-150 AD** - The **earliest known** New Testament manuscript.
- Written on papyrus, a plant-based material used for ancient manuscripts.
- **Survived nearly 2,000 years**, offering a rare glimpse into the materials and methods used for writing in the ancient world.



01 Putting on the Historians Hat



- Governments kept records of laws, taxes, and official decrees



- Historians focused on rulers, wars, and major societal events

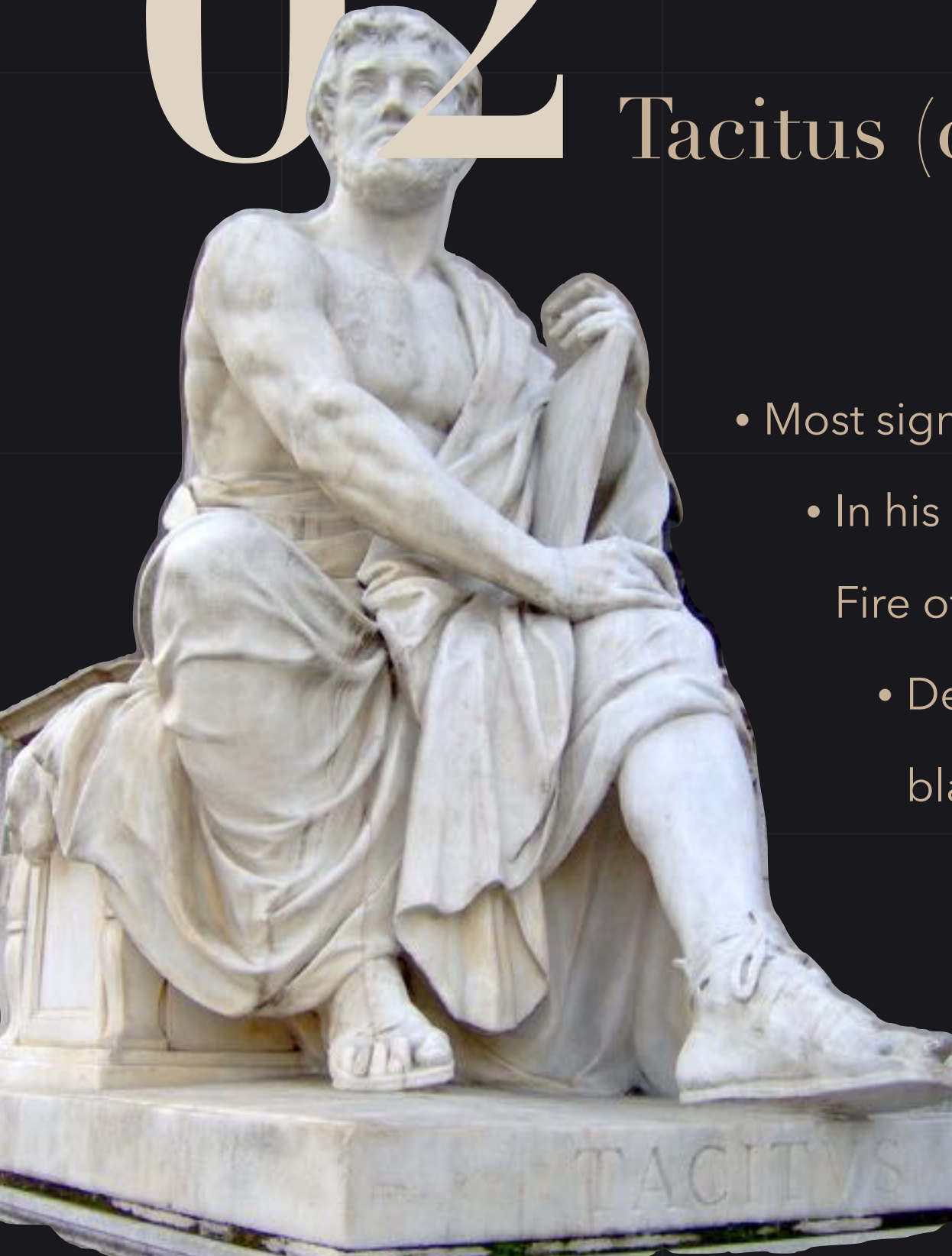


- Biographies were rare unless someone had a lasting impact

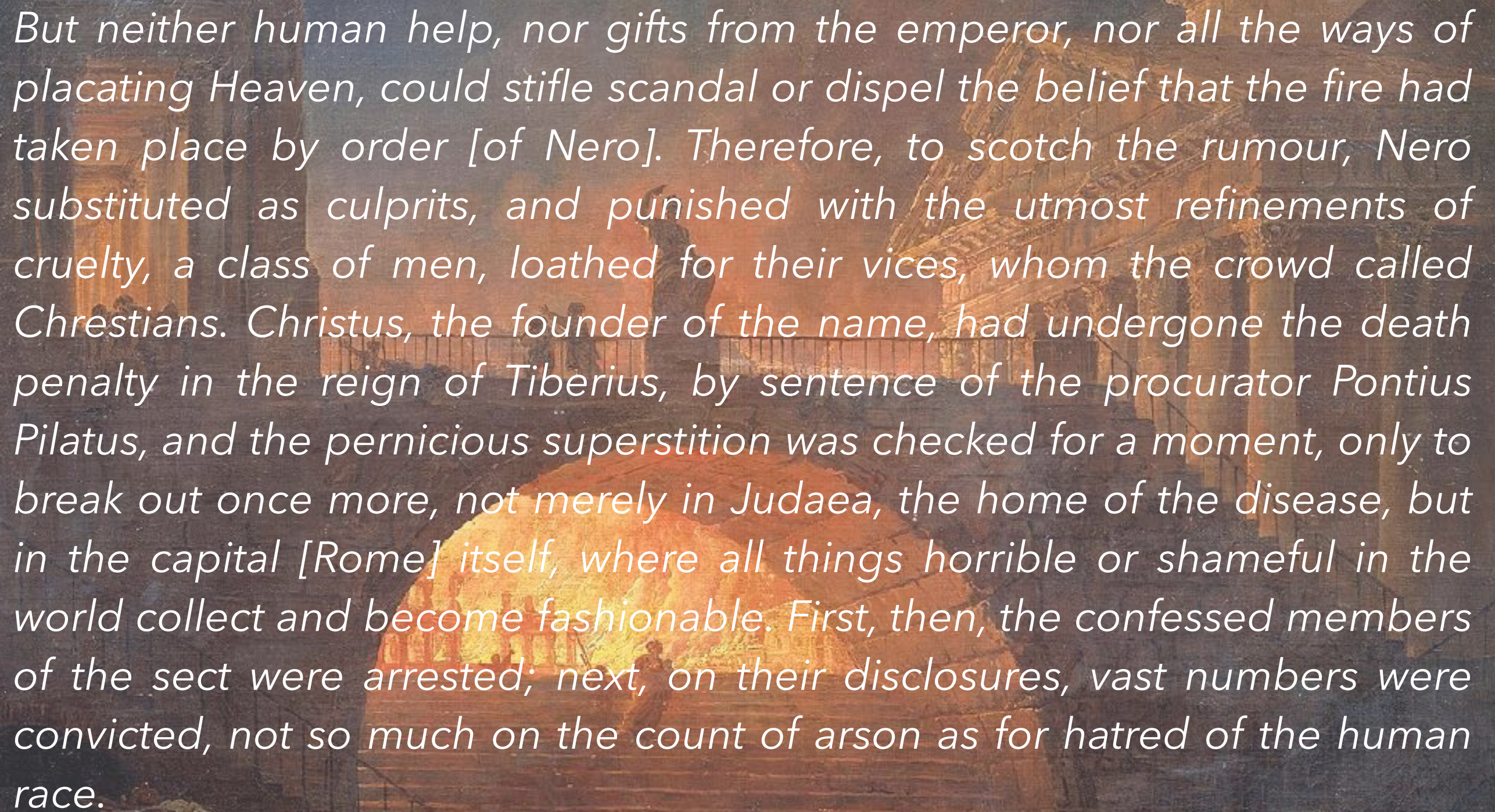
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Tacitus (c. 116 AD)

- Most significant Roman Historian.
- In his work "Annals" talks about the Great Fire of Rome in 64 AD
 - Describes how Emperor Nero blamed the Christians for the Fire



Statue of Tacitus in Vienna



But neither human help, nor gifts from the emperor, nor all the ways of placating Heaven, could stifle scandal or dispel the belief that the fire had taken place by order [of Nero]. Therefore, to scotch the rumour, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd called Chrestians. 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, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital [Rome] itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and become fashionable. First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race.

- Cornelius Tacitus, around 116 AD in his work "Annals,"

02

Tacitus (c. 116 AD)

- Tacitus was a respected historian with no sympathy for Christians, making his testimony unlikely to be biased.
- He confirms that Jesus was crucified under the authority of Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius, aligning with the Gospel accounts.
- The rapid spread of Christianity is acknowledged, despite Roman opposition.
- The passage highlights how even non-Christian sources saw Christianity as a distinct movement, separate from Judaism.
- Tacitus' reference to Christianity as a "pernicious superstition" shows the Roman view of the faith, yet its survival and expansion indicate its resilience.

02

Why Romans Saw Christianity as a Threat

- **Refusal to Participate in Roman Religion**

- Stability of the empire depended on honoring the gods.
- Christians refused sacrifices to the emperor and Roman deities.

- **Separation from Society**

- Avoided festivals, theater, and gladiatorial games.

- **Exclusive Allegiance to Christ**

- "Jesus is Lord" **challenged Caesar's authority.**

- **Misunderstandings & Rumors**

- Accused of **cannibalism** (Lord's Supper language).
- Accused of **incest** (calling each other "brother" and "sister").

- **Disruption of Social Order**

- Christianity appealed to **slaves, women, and lower classes.**
- Seen as undermining **traditional family values** and authority.

02

Josephus

c. 92-94 AD

02



- Most important non-Christian source
 - Jewish historian, former military leader
 - Two references to Jesus
 - "Condemned to cross by Pilate"
 - "The tribe of Christians, named after him"

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

- Flavius Josephus, around 92 AD in his work "Antiquities" 18.3.3.

Josephus

c. 92-94 AD

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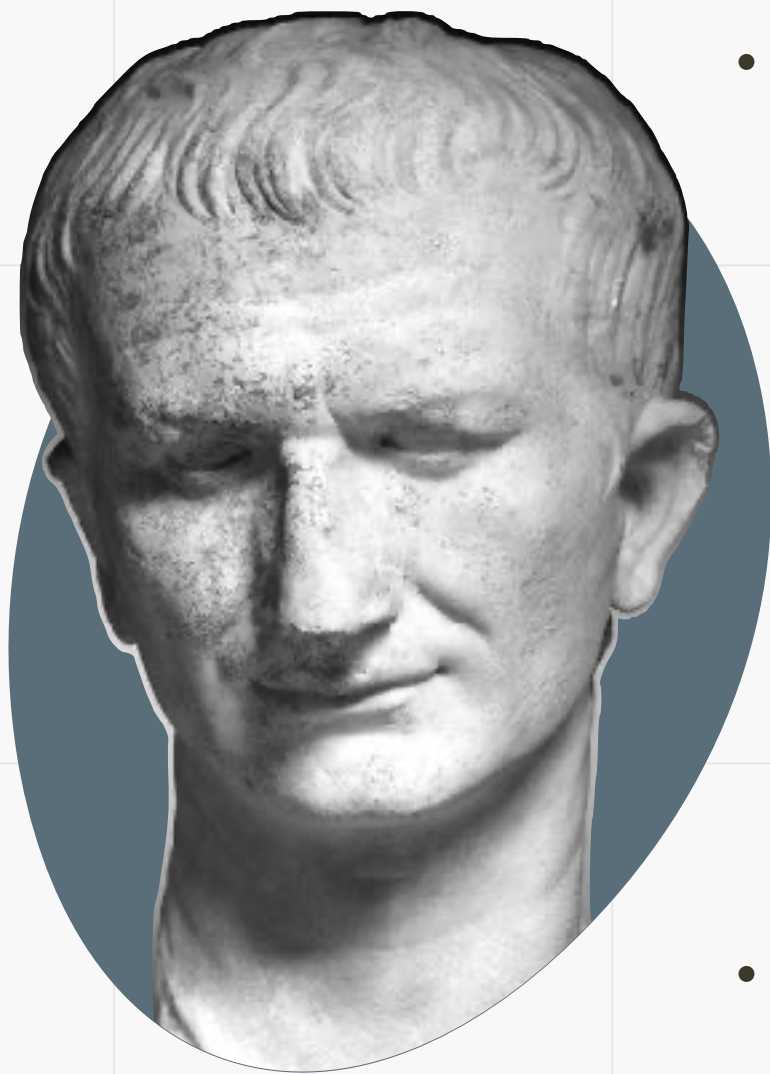


- Most important non-Christian source
 - Jewish historian, former military leader
 - Two references to Jesus
 - "Condemned to cross by Pilate"
 - "The tribe of Christians, named after him"
- Also mentions:
 - "James, brother of Jesus called Christ"

Pliny the Younger

c. 112 AD

02



- Roman governor writing to Emperor Trajan
- Describes early Christian practices
- Christians sang hymns "to Christ as to a god"
- Met regularly and maintained ethical standards
- Willing to die rather than deny Christ
- Shows widespread Christianity within 80 years

Emperor Trajan

c. 112 AD

02



- Official Roman policy toward Christian
 - Christians not to be hunted but punished
 - Opportunity to recant by worshipping Roman gods
 - Anonymous accusations to be disregarded
 - Imperial recognition of Christianity as distinct

Suetonius

c. 120 AD



02



- "Jews made disturbances at instigation of Christus"
- Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome (c. 49 AD)
- Corresponds with Acts 18:2
- Shows early Christian impact in Rome (15-20 years after crucifixion)

Megiddo Mosaic

c. 230 AD

02



- Found in an early Christian prayer hall at a Roman military site in Megiddo, Israel.
- Features an inscription that mentions "God Jesus Christ," one of the earliest known references to Jesus in a Christian worship setting.
- Shows that Christianity had spread into Roman military circles by the 3rd century AD.
- Demonstrates that Jesus was worshiped as divine well before Emperor Constantine's legalization of Christianity in the early 4th century.







03



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Key Facts Confirmed by Extra-Biblical Sources

- Independent sources confirm:
 - Jesus' existence
 - His role as a teacher
 - His reputation for unusual deeds
 - His execution under Pontius Pilate
 - The rapid spread of his movement
- Christianity spread to Rome within 20 years of Jesus' death
- Early Christians:
 - Worshipped Jesus "as a god"
 - Chose death over denying him



03

What These Sources Don't Do

- They don't deny Jesus' existence.
- They don't refute the core facts about him.
- They interpret his miracles as sorcery rather than denying them.
- They dispute his Messiahship but confirm he had devoted followers.
- These sources independently corroborate the New Testament



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Strengthening Personal Faith

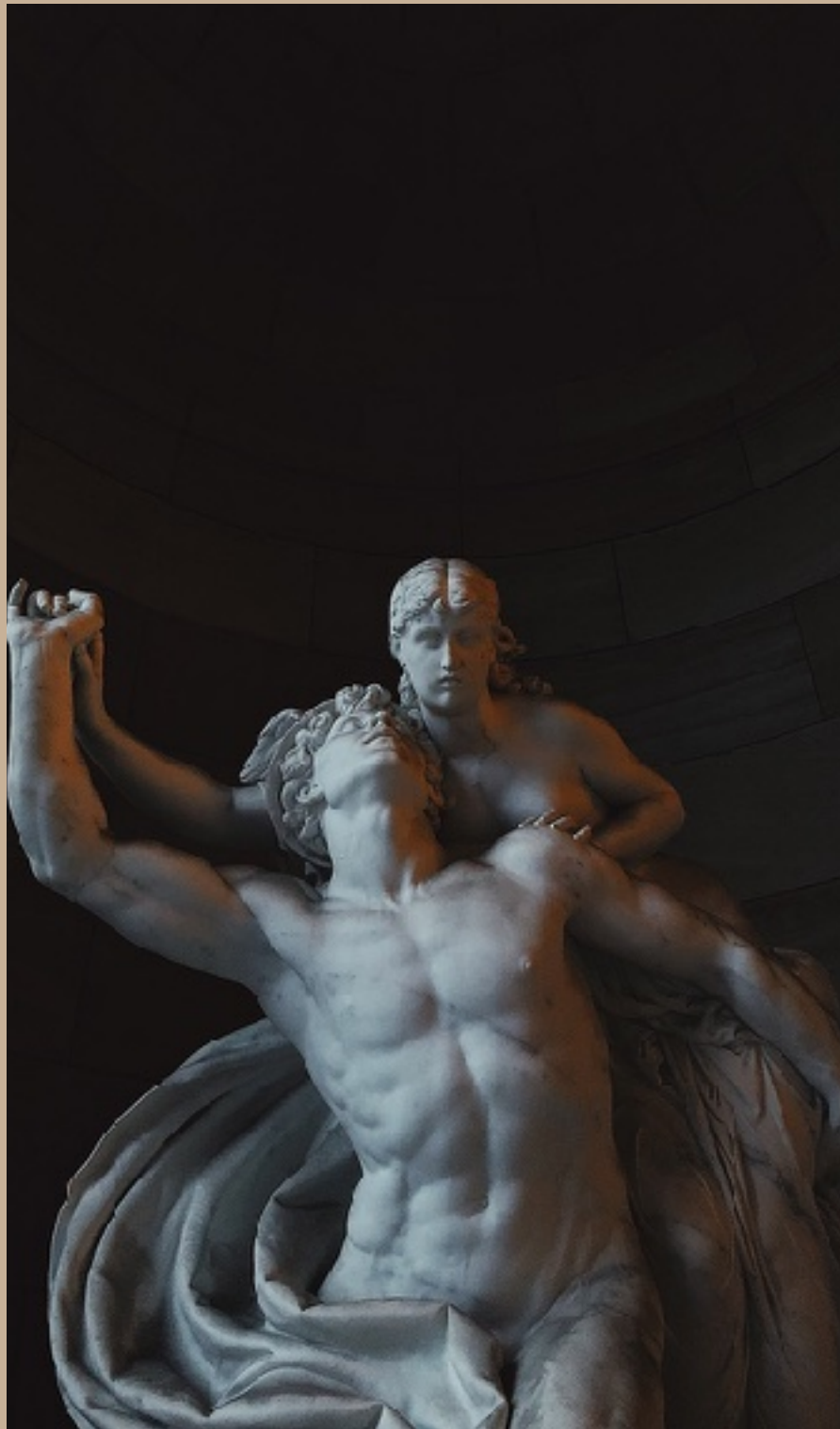
- **Historical confirmation** reinforces confidence in the Gospels.
- Jesus' existence, crucifixion, and Christianity's rapid spread are supported by non-Christian sources.
- Historical evidence shows Christianity is **rooted in reality**, not just tradition or experience.



03

Engaging with Others

- Many assume Jesus is a **myth** or that Christianity lacks historical basis.
- **Extra-biblical sources** can provide evidence for discussions.
- Instead of saying "*The Bible says so,*" we can point to secular historical confirmations.



03

Cultural Understanding

- How was Christianity perceived in the ancient world?
- Romans: Viewed as a **superstition** and a **threat** to society.
- Christianity has always been countercultural.
- The early church faced **opposition and persecution**, yet it thrived.



03



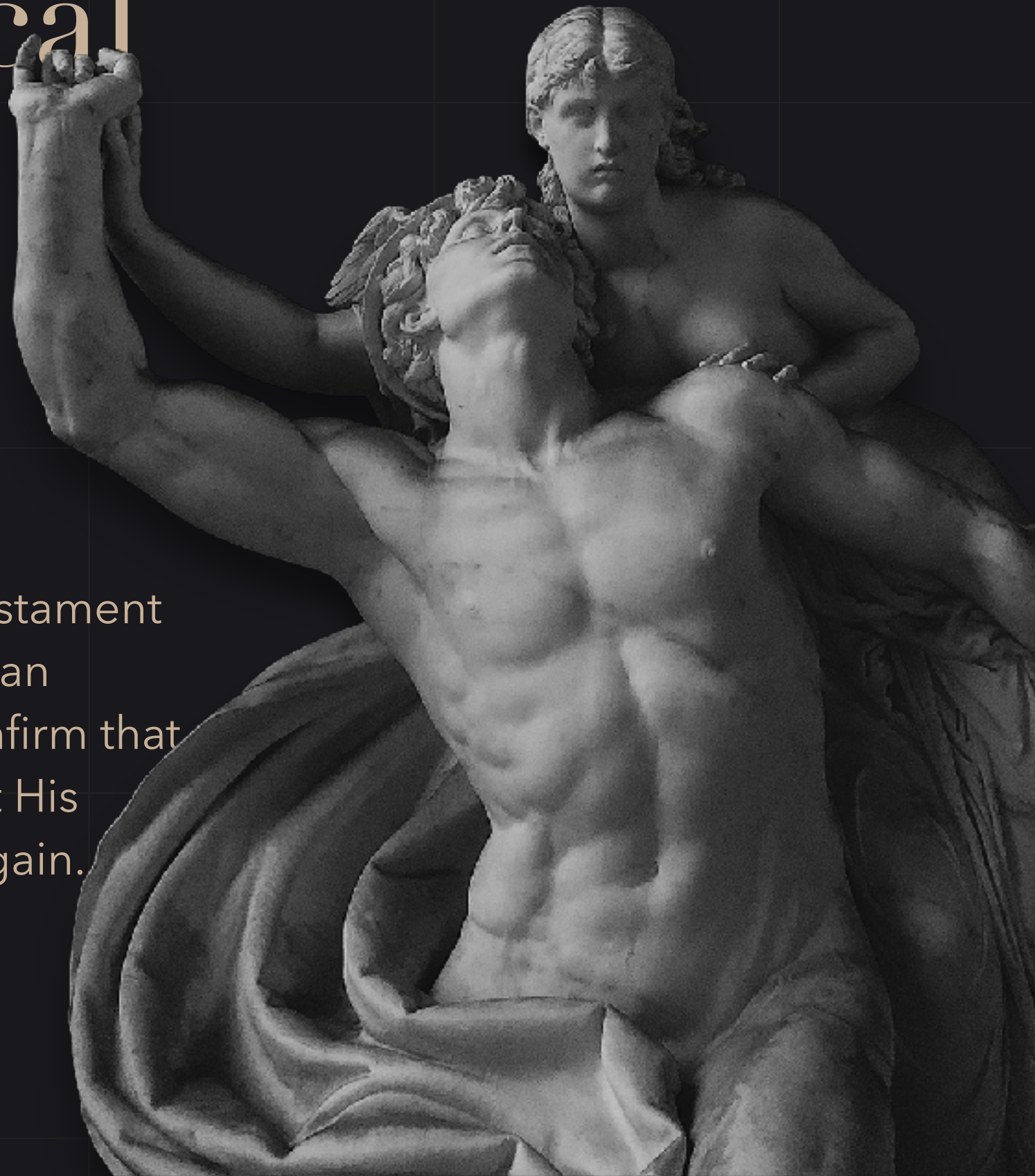
Personal Application

- Personal Application
- Early Christians suffered greatly but did not deny Christ.
- Their boldness should challenge us:
 - Are we **bold in our witness**?
 - Do we **stand firm** when faced with opposition?
- **The historical reality of Jesus should transform how we live.**

Extra-Biblical sources for Jesus

For the skeptic:

You don't have to take the New Testament at face value—but even non-Christian historians (Roman and Jewish) confirm that Jesus lived, was crucified, and that His followers truly believed He rose again. That's worth considering."



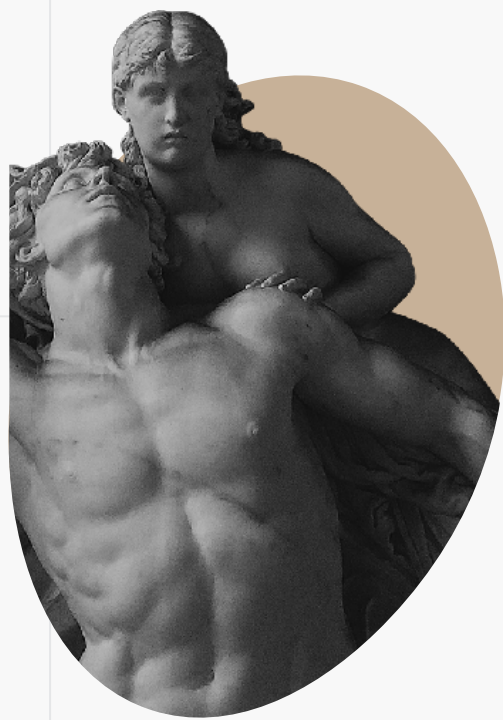
Thallus

50-75AD

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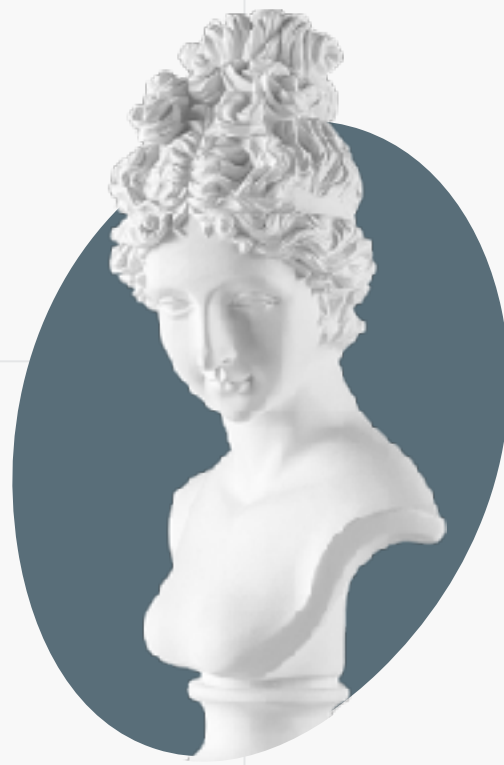


- Earliest non-Christian reference
- Mentioned darkness at crucifixion
- Tried to explain as eclipse
- Writing just ~20 years after events
- Preserved in later Christian writings



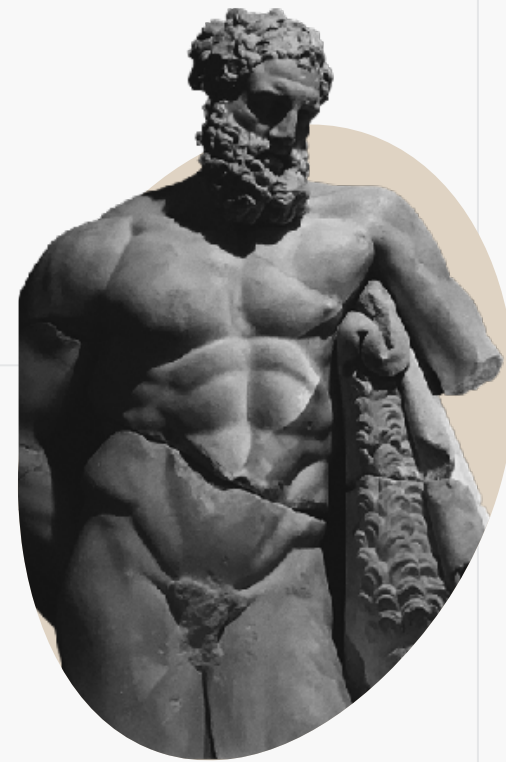
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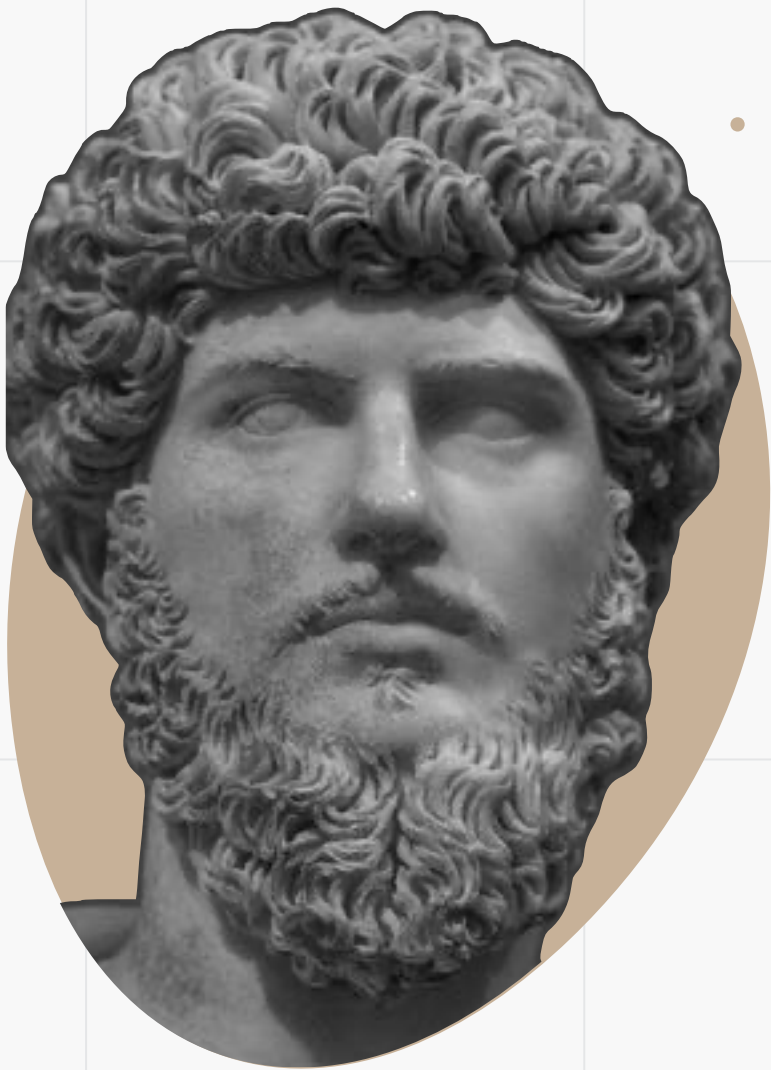
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Emperor Hadrian

c. 130 AD

02



- Letter on proper legal procedures for Christians
- Shows Christianity's continued spread
- Imperial recognition of the movement