Jesus in Pagan Authors: Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny, Lucian

Historical Jesus, Week 4, Lecture 11

Omit from Spoken Lecture. Suggested Background Reading for these 3 lectures
Fitzmyer, Christological Catechism, Q. 2, “How much can we know about the Jesus of history?”
Meier, Marginal Jew, Chapter 4, Sources: Other Pagan & Jewish Authors, pp. 89-111.

Intro Remarks
Review: Josephus
Pagan authors

Tacitus, Roman Historian, born ca. 56/57 - died, ca. 118 A.D.
Goal of The Annals: A History of Rome from A.D. 14 - ca. 68 A.D.
14 A.D. Tiberius began to reign 68 A.D. end of Nero’s reign

Omit from Spoken Lecture: Leave in Notes. Roman Dating
Of course to use our A.D. calendar is an anachronism.
Roman dates were AUC (Ab Urbe Condita, from the foundation of the city) AUC 1 = 753 B.C.

Problem: Gap in Annals, 29-32 A.D.
Only a couple of manuscripts (contrast over 5000 of NT!)
When something is missing in them, we are up the proverbial creek without a paddle!
The time when Jesus was executed is not found in The Annals.
We do not know if, writing in the early 2nd century, Tacitus mentions the execution of Jesus in his account of 30 A.D.
A “blip” on the radar of history. Imagine the “Roman Evening News” of 30 A.D.
“. . . and in Judea 3 terrorists were executed. And that’s the way it is this Friday in the 723rd year of the City of Rome.”

The Fire of 64 A.D.
However, he does mention “Christus” in his description of the fire of 64 A.D.
Nero wanted to build some spectacular buildings.
Problem: there were lots of poor people living on the land he needed.
His solution: pay thugs to start a fire to burn down the slum.
Afterward, there was much suspicion that the fire was not accidental, and Nero had been the real culprit.

Quote From Tacitus, Annals 15.44 (Meier quotes him on pp. 88-89).
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, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue. [Omit the rest from spoken lecture. Leave in the notes for informational purposes.] First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not

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1 I have decided to number the lectures throughout the course consecutively. Lectures 1-10 were given in Weeks 1-3.
2 Since Roman numerals have no zero, I am not sure if you have to subtract the Christian year from 753 or 752 to get our equivalent.
so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts’ skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his Gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus, mixing with the crowd in the habit of a charioteer, or mounted on his car. Hence, in spite of a guilt which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man.  

**Tacitus’ View of Christians**

They are rightly despised for their abominable crimes and vices. They have a hatred of humanity. They believe a dangerous “superstition” -- a newly invented oriental cult that rejects Roman gods. Christians: just one more example of Rome’s decline from a noble past into corruption and decadence.

**3 Key Statements about “Christus”**

1) Died under Tiberius (A.D. 14-37); Died under Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26-36)
2) The manner of death was **execution**.
   Crucifixion is not explicitly mentioned; the normal way a Roman governor would deal with a troublemaker.
3) Execution briefly suppressed the movement, but it broke out again after his death.
   Tacitus understands the Christian movement began **before** the execution of “Christus”
   Otherwise it could not have been suppressed **after** he died.

**“Christus” as a Name.** Tacitus never uses the name “Jesus.”
He seems to think that “Christus” was the proper name of the founder of Christianity.
*Chrestos* was a common name meaning “Kindly.”
Possibly Tacitus is deliberately making an ironic pun on the name.  
   These people who hate everyone else where founded by a man named “Kindly” (*Chrestos*).

**Sources Used by Tacitus?**

Had he read Josephus?
Was Tacitus simply stating what was “common knowledge” in the early 2nd century?
Official Records? (but he makes a mistake about Pilate)
   He calls Pilate a “procurator” when technically he was a “prefect.”
   Even if he had access to official records, he was citing them “from memory,” not copying directly.
Note: when historians get “picky” about Gospel details, they are not being mean to the Gospel writers.
   They are subjecting them to the same type of scrutiny the give to all writers of the ancient world.

**Suetonius, Roman Historian, ca. 69-140 A.D.**

*Lives of the Twelve Caesars*
From Julius Caesar to Domitian, i.e., from ca. 85 B.C. - 96 A.D.
Cf. the PBS series, *I Claudius* for a good dramatization

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5 Ibid., 90-91.

6 Ibid, p. 100, note 7.
Life of Claudius, 25
He allowed the people of Ilium [i.e., Trojans] perpetual exemption from tribute, on the ground that they were the founders of the Roman race, reading an ancient letter of the senate and people of Rome written in Greek to king Seleucus, in which they promised him their friendship and alliance only on condition that he should keep their kinsfolk of Ilium free from every burden. Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome: He allowed the envoys of the Germans to sit in the orchestra, led by their naïve self-confidence; [omit the rest from lecture; leave in notes for reference purposes] for when they had been taken to the seats occupied by the common people and saw the Parthian and Armenian envoys sitting with the senate, they moved of their own accord to the same part of the theatre, protesting that their merits and rank were no whit inferior. 7

Remarks on Context
I put in the sentences before and after the main one to give you an idea of context.
Main theme: how other nations are acting and being treated in Rome at this time.
Suetonius has no great interest in questions concerning Jews or Christians -- he does not even distinguish them. He mentions them as one example among many activities of foreigners.8

Garbled Understanding?
Disturbances at the instigation of “Chrestus.”
Christus is a title, not a name. (compare “President” & “Trump;” “Pope” & “Francis;” “Father” & “Pat.”
“Chrestus” for “Christus? As if Chrestus himself were a trouble-maker in Rome.
More likely, the Jews in their synagogues are arguing whether the Christ has already come or not.
At the time of Claudius, from the Roman perspective, “Christians” are one of several “Jewish” groups.

Pliny the Younger, b. 61/62 - d. 113 A.D.
Governor of Bithynia, ca. 111-113 A.D.
He writes to Emperor Trajan. People have been denounced to him as Christians.
If they renounced Christianity, he allowed them to live.
If not, he executed them -- whatever they believe, stubbornness deserves to be punished.
Anyone who worshipped the image of the emperor and cursed Christ he allowed to live.
Real Christians will not do either.
Some admitted they had been Christians some time ago, but had since left the movement.

Letter 96
From those who admitted they had been Christians in the past, he discovered:
. . . that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. Even this practice, however, they had abandoned after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your orders, I had forbidden political associations.9

8 If you take the time to look up the passage you will see the following mentioned: Those from Rhodes, Ilium [Tojans], Lycians, Jews, Germans.
Trajan’s Response (Letter 97)

THE method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those denounced to you as Christians is extremely proper. It is not possible to lay down any general rule which can be applied as the fixed standard in all cases of this nature. No search should be made for these people; when they are denounced and found guilty they must be punished; with the restriction, however, that when the party denies himself to be a Christian, and shall give proof that he is not (that is, by adoring our gods) he shall be pardoned on the ground of repentance, even though he may have formerly incurred suspicion. Informations without the accuser’s name subscribed must not be admitted in evidence against anyone, as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and by no means agreeable to the spirit of the age.10

What do we learn?
Something about Christianity in the early second century. Christians are worshipping Christ “as a god.”
Nothing about Jesus himself.

Lucian of Samosata, ca. 115 - ca. 200 A.D.
Cartlidge & Dungan describe him as a second century precursor of H. L. Mencken.11
Describing a charlatan who takes advantage of people, among whom were the gullible group called Christians.

The Passing of Peregrinus, 11-13. 12

It was now that he [Proteus, who used Peregrinus as an alias] came across the priests and scribes of the Christians, in Palestine, and picked up their queer creed. I can tell you, he pretty soon convinced them of his superiority; prophet, elder, ruler of the Synagogue--he was everything at once; expounded their books, commented on them, wrote books himself. They took him for a God, accepted his laws, and declared him their president. The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day,—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. [Stop here. Skip to next highlighted section. Leave the rest in the notes for “informational purposes.”] Well, the end of it was that Proteus was arrested and thrown into prison. This was the very thing to lend an air to his favourite arts of clap-trap and wonder-working; he was now a made man. The Christians took it all very seriously: he was no sooner in prison, than they began trying every means to get him out again,—but without success. Everything else that could be done for him they most devoutly did. They thought of nothing else. Orphans and ancient widows might be seen hanging about the prison from break of day. Their officials bribed the gaolers to let them sleep inside with him. Elegant dinners were conveyed in; their sacred writings were read; and our old friend Peregrine (as he was still called in those days) became for them "the modern Socrates." In some of the Asiatic cities, too, the Christian communities put themselves to the expense of sending deputations, with offers of sympathy, assistance, and legal advice. The activity of these people, in dealing with any matter that affects their community, is something extraordinary; they spare no trouble, no expense. Peregrine, all this time, was making quite an income on the strength of his bondage; money came pouring in. You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on trust, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property. Now an

10 Letter 97, Ibid., 407.
adroit, unscrupulous fellow, who has seen the world, has only to get among these simple souls, and his fortune is pretty soon made; he plays with them.

**Information about Jesus.** He was a “crucified sage.”
He was crucified for introducing the “novel rites” of the Christians.
He was the “original lawgiver” of the Christians.
He taught his disciples: 1) they are all brothers; 2) the had to deny the gods of the Greeks.

**Meier’s Summary**
Josephus is the only independent 1st-century non Christian source with information about Jesus.
Tacitus is a possibly independent 2nd-century source. He adds nothing new to what we know from Josephus.
Pliny, Suetonius, and Lucian give us information about Christians, not information about Jesus.

The Dead Sea Scrolls and Jesus. Week 4, Lecture 12

**Another Series from Paulist Press**
In my “Lagniappe Lectures” [last week -- I don’t know where they will be in the final course!] WATSA
This week another important series: Responses to 101 Questions on . . .

Main source for this lecture. **Joseph A. Fitzmyer**
Directed my dissertation. President of CBA, SBL. Member of PBC. A scholar’s scholar.
A bibliography about the DSS -- 200 pages!

There is a Grammar of Qumran Aramaic in the bibliography.
Before the DSS we knew about Aramaic a couple hundred years before Jesus.
We knew about Aramaic a couple hundred years after Jesus.
Languages can change a lot in a couple centuries.
With the DSS we have Aramaic at the time of Jesus.
Fitzmyer read the Aramaic documents, and he is the one who write the grammer of Qumran Aramaic
He is a “scholar’s scholar!

**A Bit of History**
Since their discovery in 1948, there has been much fascination with the scrolls.
Many sensational claims have been made in the press and on various TV shows.
If you want a sober evaluation without “hype” Fitzmyer’s book is pure gold!

**Q. 71 Is Jesus of Nazareth Mentioned in Any of the Qumran Scrolls?**
This was written in 1992. They were still deciphering postage-stamp size fragments”
“So far, there is no mention of him in any known text. Since most of the scrolls date from the second and first century B.C. it is not surprising that he is not mentioned. Those two that are dated paleographically [by their handwriting, PJM] to the first century A. D. usually come from so early a time in that century that there is little likelihood that they would mention him.

Fitzmyer quotes G. Lancaster Harding, director of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities
Before the 6-Day War, Qumran was part of Jordan.

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Many authorities consider that Christ himself also studied with them [the Essenes, PJM] for a time. If that be true, then we have in this little building something unique indeed. For alone of all ancient remains in Jordan, this has remained unchanged -- indeed, unseen and unknown to this day. These, then, are the very halls that He looked upon, the corridors and rooms through which He wandered and in which He sat, brought to light once again after nearly 1900 years.

**Points to Remember!**
Museum directors want people to come to their museums! They want people to **donate** to their museums! Scholars want to write books so that people will read them! [And also, so that they can get tenure!]

**Hypothetical question:**

1. If I have some interesting information about the dialect of Aramaic 100 years before Jesus . . .
2. If I have some secret information about an organization that Jesus actually belonged to that the Church has never told you about -- and does not want you to know about!

**Who is going to sell more books?** Hype sells books! Hype gets people to watch TV!

**Fitzmyer’s Response to G. L. Harding**
This of course is speculation. That Jesus knew of the Qumran community is not unlikely. That he taught some of the same things they espoused is not impossible. [e.g., both were against divorce]. But there is always the problem that, though Jesus is depicted in our Gospels as reacting to Pharisees and Sadducees, there is no mention whatever of the Essenes, about whom we now know from the Qumran scrolls and from Josephus and from Philo. Did Jesus know of this Jewish settlement on the west side of the Dead Sea? Did he ever visit it? Who knows?

**Speculative Suggestion:** Gospel Passages that “hint” that Jesus knew of Qumran.
**Matt 24:24-26,** “If they say, he is in the desert, do not go out there!”
Is this an allusion to the Dead Sea community? A warning from Jesus to avoid them?

**Another Speculative Suggestion:** Matt 19:12
The people of Qumran seemed to have practiced celibacy.
**Matt 19:12,** Jesus mentions those “who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom.”
Did Jesus have Qumran in mind when he made that comment?
Fitzmyer: “Who can say? One can easily multiply such speculative suggestions.”
Suggestions are not evidence!
So the answer to question 71 is: **No, Jesus is not mentioned in the Qumran scrolls.**

**Q. 72 Is There Anything Christian in the Scrolls?**
The answer is “no.” At least not yet. There’s always a possibility that Bedouin will discover another cave in which something will come to light that mentions disciples of Jesus . . . There are, of course, certain interpreters of Qumran texts who have tried [to make the texts refer to Christians].

**Speculation from Robert H. Eisenman** (U. of California at Long Beach)
James is the “Teacher of Righteousness”
Paul is the “Man of the Lie”
Most scholars think these are references to people who lived about 100 years **before** the time of Jesus.
The dispute between these two relates to events when the community was first being founded.

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14 My M.A. in Liturgy from Notre Dame was my first degree after the seminary. Doctor Ralph Kiefer (may he rest in peace!) taught the introductory course. He told us we needed to learn how to read for “essential information.” He told us about the “pressure to publish” in the academic world. I will never forget his words: “Remember, there are many articles that should have been footnotes, and there are many books that should have been articles!
The “Man of the Lie” is a Jerusalem priest they do not get along with.
The “Teacher of Righteousness” is the teacher who founded the Qumran community in the desert.

**Speculation from Barbara Thiering** (Australian scholar)
John the Baptist is the “Teacher of Righteousness”
Jesus is the “Wicked Priest”
Her outrageous theories have been given time on American TV.\(^{15}\)

Fitzmyer
Such opinions ride roughshod over the archaeological, paleographical, and radio carbon dating of the evidence that clearly pinpoints the Qumran scrolls to the pre-Christian century.

**Fitzmyer compares DSS & Christian Literature**

**Vast Majority of Christian works** are judged by scholars to have been composed outside of Judea.
E.g., none of the Gospels was written in Judea. None of Paul’s letters, undisputed or disputed.
1 & 2 Peter; 1, 2, & 3 John; Hebrews; Revelation.
Someone has suggested that 1 Peter & Hebrews are exceptions.

Fitzmyer: “That is not impossible.”

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<tr>
<th>Certain</th>
<th>&gt; almost certain</th>
<th>&gt; very probable</th>
<th>&gt; probable</th>
<th>&gt; improbable</th>
<th>&gt; speculative</th>
<th>&gt; highly speculative</th>
<th>&gt; not impossible</th>
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This is how Fitzmyer (and Brown) often damn proposals with faint praise.

**Dead Sea Scrolls -- Composed in Judea**, composed in Hebrew and Aramaic.
There were a few Greek fragments in one of the caves.\(^{16}\)

**Meier’s Summary**\(^{17}\)
There are interesting parallels, but some popularizers are guilty of “Parallelomania”
One of his lectures: “Parallels are just that: parallel. And **parallels never meet.**”
No Indication Jesus was ever directly connected with the Qumran community.
Jesus is never mentioned in the Qumran documents.
His free-wheeling attitude toward the Law “is the very antithesis” of Qumran’s strict observance.

**Argument with Pharisees about healing on the Sabbath.**
If you will pull your animal out of a pit on the Sabbath, why should not this woman be healed?
Jesus could not have used that argument against the Qumran sectarians.
If your animal falls into a pit, it has to stay there until the Sabbath is over.
For the Qumran rigorists, the Pharisees were incredibly lax.
For the Pharisees, Jesus was often too free-wheeling in his approach to Moses.
Those who try to link Jesus with Qumran have not thought deeply enough about this question.

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\(^{15}\) I forget whether I have seen her on the Discovery Channel or the History Channel -- or both.

\(^{16}\) One of these mentioned “Jesus.” A Spanish Jesuit, Jose O’Callahan (Error! Main Document Only.) “Notas sobre 7Q tomadas en el 'Rockefeller Museum' de Jerusalén,” Bib 53 [1972] 518-24 argued that this was a reference to Mark 6:52-53, part of the passage on which I wrote my dissertation. Further studies, however, have convinced most scholars that the fragment refers to the OT “Jesus,” i.e., Joshua, the son of Nun, who served as “general” for Moses.

\(^{17}\) Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 1, p. 94.
Jesus: Mishnah & Talmud. Week 4, Lecture 13

Introductory Remarks
We have found a reference to Jesus in the works of the Jewish historian Josephus. There are references to Jesus in other Jewish works, the Mishnah and the Talmud.

Question: Do these references, like Josephus, give us independent information about Jesus?

The purpose of this lecture is to give you the “flavor” of these documents.18

What is the Mishnah?

It was sometimes called “the Second Torah.” The Hebrew word for “second” is shenit.

The word mishnah, mi-shn -ah comes from the same “root” as shenit.

Bible: The Torah was given to Moses on Mount Sinai
The Pharisees believed God also gave Moses an oral law, which he did not write down at that time.
Jesus refers to them keeping “the tradition of the elders.”

Compare the later Catholic view of “Scripture & Tradition” to the Protestant view of “Scripture alone.”

This oral law was compiled and written down by Judah the Prince about 200 A.D.

Of course, now it was no longer “oral!”

What is the Talmud?

Mishnah + Gemara = Talmud. Gemara means “completion.”

Other traditions (mostly later) are added to the Mishnah.

Talmud is related to the word meaning “teaching.” A “student” is a talmid.

There are two Talmuds: The Babylonian Talmud & the Palestinian Talmud.

They were put into writing in the 5th - 6th centuries (400’s & 500’s).

Compare Catholic Tradition.
Scripture is the earliest stage.
Then we have the second-century Apostolic Fathers and Apologists. analogous to Mishnah
Then we have later Church Fathers. analogous to Talmud

Description of a Page of Talmud (visit the library of your local synagogue)
Central Square: Torah. Surrounding Square: Mishnah
Surrounding Square: Gemara The whole page is Talmud

Scholarly Opinion: There are NO independent references to Jesus19

Majority of Jewish Scholars
Meier

2nd, 3rd, 4th centuries: Jews are fighting with Christians. They make statements about Jesus.
These later Jews have no independent memories of Jesus from the first century.
They are responding to later Christian teachings that they have heard.

Story of Zgi. “Why did Jesus hate the Jews?”
He had come from Russia. Many of the Christians he had known hated Jews.
Why would he not assume that Zgi was not responding to “Jesus.” He was responding to “Jesus as portrayed by the Christians he knew.”

18 There is an excellent article in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary about the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Jewish Literature.
Christian-Jewish Relations -- a short history
Jewish Ghetto in Rome (ca. 6 x 6 blocks). Could not go out at night. Had to wear special clothes.

Catholics & Jews, 20th Century
Pope John XXIII welcomed Jewish leaders to Vatican. “I am Joseph, your little brother.”
Pope John Paul II went to Jewish synagogue & prayed there
We do not want to naively retroject our current good relations into the past.

Scholarly Opinion: There ARE independent references to Jesus
Joseph Klausner. We are going to look at two passages that Klausner argues refers to Jesus.

Recall story of the Sadducees confronting Jesus.
The dead man’s brother is supposed to marry his sister-in-law (Yebama)
Tractate: how do you treat sisters-in-law, and all related issues?

Quote from Mishnah -- Discussion of illegitimate children
Who is considered a bastard? —In every case of near kin which is prohibited.[i.e. cases of incest, PJM]
This is the opinion of R. Akiba. Simon the Temanite says, Any such for which they are liable to extermination at the hands of Heaven, and the law is according to his view. R. Joshua says, Any such for which they are liable to punishment by death by the Court.” [You could be put to death for adultery, PJM]
R. Simon ben Azzai said, “I found a genealogical scroll in Jerusalem and in it was inscribed, So-and-so is a bastard through a man’s wife” confirming the statement of R. Joshua.’ If one’s wife died he is permitted to take her sister. If he divorced her and she then died he is allowed to marry her sister. If his widowed sister-in-law died he is allowed to marry her sister. If he submitted to chalitzah [see book of Ruth: someone takes off his shoe & swears “she is not my kin”] from her and she then died, he is permitted to marry her sister. If she were afterward married to another and then died he is allowed to marry her sister.

Does this passage tell us anything about Jesus?
Most scholars say no. Some say the reference to “so-and-so” being a “bastard” is such a reference.
Most scholars say: They are simply discussing who is legitimate and who is not.
Fr. Conrad: “ox-tail soup”
Is this statement about Jesus. Probably not!

Talmud. Sanhedrin 43a21 Discussion of Capital Punishment
MISHNAH. IF THEN THEY FIND HIM INNOCENT, THEY DISCHARGE HIM; BUT IF NOT, HE GOES FORTH TO BE STONED, AND A HERALD PRECEDES HIM [CRYING]: SO-AND-SO, THE SON OF SO-AND-SO, IS GOING FORTH TO BE STONED BECAUSE HE COMMITTED SUCH AND SUCH AN OFFENCE, AND SO-AND-SO ARE HIS WITNESSES. WHOEVER KNOWS ANYTHING IN HIS FAVOUR, LET HIM COME AND STATE IT.

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My Comment
Yes, we do have capital punishment. But you cannot just execute people. These are the proper procedures. The “oral tradition” is modifying the “written tradition” -- in the direction of lenience!

GEMARA. Abaye said; It must also be announced: On such and such a day, at such and such and hour, and in such and such a place [the crime was committed], in case there are some who know [to the contrary], so that they can come forward and prove the witnesses.

AND A HERALD PRECEDES HIM etc. This implies, only immediately before [the execution], but not previous thereto. [In contradiction to this] it was taught: On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one 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 the Passover! — ‘Ulla retorted: Do you suppose that he was one for whom a defense could be made? Was he not a Mesith [enticer], concerning whom Scripture says, Neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him? With Yeshu however it was different, for he was connected with the government [or royalty, i.e., influential].

Comment Does this story from the 5th century give us independent information about the trial of Jesus? Reaction to Christian stories that Jesus was illegally executed.

Christian & Jewish Polemics
Christians: It is against Jewish law to have a capital punishment trial at night.
Look how wicked these Jews were!

Jews: It is against the Jewish law to have a capital punishment trial at night.
Look how these Gospels lie!

The historical question. Was this law from the 5th century A.D. in force at the time of Jesus????

Recall how LATE the Talmud is!
Think of how much American law has changed in the last 100 years! [comparing Mishnah]
in the last 300 years! [comparing information from Talmud]

We used to burn witches! Now women vote!

Summary. There is probably no independent information about Jesus in the Mishnah and Talmud.
The references are responses to later Christian teachings, not first-century memories of Jesus.
There is no new information about Jesus in these Jewish traditions.
“Hence, apart from Josephus, Jewish literature of the early Christian period offers no independent source for inquiry into the historical Jesus. Indeed, why should it? Engaged in a fierce struggle for its own survival and definition, early rabbinic Judaism had other matters on its mind--matters that, from its own perspective, were much more important.”

22 The words in ALL CAPITALS are from the Mishnah. This is how my electronic resource does it.