

Research notes on the darkness of the Crucifixion

Eric Peterman - GBF

The darkness of the final three hours of the crucifixion: 12-3pm (6th - 9th hr).

- Cultural presupposition bias: We have a cultural bias against a proper understanding of this darkness, our memories of the crucifixion having been shaped and informed and imprinted by movies, media and even artwork over the centuries.
No movie can properly capture it (who would watch a film where half the crucifixion is pitch black?), and thus it is: not shown, shown as brief thunder and lightning, or shown briefly as dimmed/gray lighting.
- Theological and soteriological implications: The first half (9-12 or 3rd to 6th hr) was *coram hominibus* – *in the presence of man*. It served several purposes, as outlined in the gospel accounts. But the second half (12-3pm or 6th to 9th hr) serves an entirely different purpose.

Failure to account for ½ the time of the period on the cross as dark (ie, man unable to see, and thus *coram deo* – *in the presence of God*, God being the primary audience and angels, holy and unholy in observation) results in a skewed view of what the cross is about and puts *too much emphasis* on the physical suffering and man's observations and feelings and Jesus' interactions with those around him (as potent and true as these all are), and *vastly insufficient emphasis* on the Audience of One, God the Father, and the Biblical emphasis on the wrath of God toward sin, poured out solely and fiercely on the Son, and on the necessity of satisfying the holy justice of God.

The darkness served more than one purpose, but a primary one was to exclude man from and focus attention on the terrible transaction between the Holy God and the One who knew no sin, yet became sin for us.

- **What is the darkness at the crucifixion:**
 - It is the preternatural¹ shutting off or obscuring of the natural transmission of solar light to the earth, due to the supernatural judgment of God the Father on the Son of Man, who became sin itself for us.

¹ Preternatural: A phenomenon (or a being) that has objectively no reason or source in the natural world or the natural laws of physics, but has its reason or source from outside of the physical universe. Angels and demons are quite real, but are neither supernatural, or natural, they are preternatural creatures so they can operate in both the spiritual and the physical worlds A supernatural act is a direct act of God, who alone is the supernatural being. A natural event is something that occurs due to the normal operation of the natural universe.

– The Internal Evidence

– Scriptural texts recording the darkness:

Matt 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44-45.

- **Darkness** – *skotos*, σκότος – does not mean *dim* -ἐβαρυώπησαν (Gen 48:10 BGT - LXX). It means “dark”.

For example, *moral/spiritual darkness (skotos)* is in stark contrast to *moral and spiritual light (phos)* in John and Matthew and Luke. It does not mean spiritual and moral *dimness* – a *relatively* lower light environment. Instead, light and dark are not relative terms on a scale, in this usage, they are absolute, polar opposites.

In other words, it was *physically dark*, as if the sun were gone and it was night time!

- Came/fell **on the land** (ge): so earth, and “all” is used. All the earth or all the land. So this either means the entirety of Israel, or much more likely the entire globe/world. (External evidence shows it being dark throughout the known world).
- The idea of **came/fell** is *sudden*, not *gradual/fading out and then in*. This is like a blackout curtain dropping instantly over a sunlit window.
- **It could not have been a lunar eclipse of the sun** (called a solar eclipse, an eclipse of the sun by the moon):

Reasoning:

1. Darkness vs dimness – eclipses don't produce darkness, just brief dimness.
 2. Solar eclipses don't last 3 hours. 2-7 minutes of totality is all for any given point on earth.
 3. Solar eclipse totality shadow is about 80 miles wide. Not wide enough to cover even all Israel much less, “all the earth”.
 4. Eclipses gradually come on and recede, not suddenly.
 5. The crucifixion occurred within 1 day of Passover, Passover being determined always by the moon, and that being a full moon of Spring. Thus, the sun is in opposition to the moon. A lunar eclipse, OTOH, requires the moon to pass between the sun and the earth, the moon being a mere sliver of visibility. Therefore, a lunar eclipse is impossible, by definition, during the week of Passover.
- **It could not have been any other solar/planetary body**, as there is no planet that obscures the sun for the earth, and if a wandering (unknown)

object were large enough to obscure the sun it would be of such mass and proximity that it would have dramatically upset the surface and orbit of the earth and moon, possibly even destroying them.

- **It could not have been a storm**, since these produce dimness, not dark and they're common; no storm in an afternoon is noteworthy anyway.
- **It could not have been a volcanic ash cloud**, as these come on slowly, remain for a long period, and recede slowly, and again the light is dimmed but not removed. (External evidence shows no volcanic activity in the region in the period in question).
- **The three NT authors who recorded the darkness:**
 - Matthew a direct eyewitness to the even of the crucifixion.
 - Mark was a close companion of Peter, one of Christ's three innermost apostles. Mark also travelled with Paul, Luke, and many of the earliest Christians in the Book of Acts.
 - Luke was a Greek physician and historian who carefully investigated the events of Christ's life. His historical investigation was based on direct and indirect eyewitness accounts from Paul, Peter, James, Mark, Mary (the mother of Jesus), and many of Jesus' first female followers. Luke is considered to be one of the most reliable historians of all time.
- A.T. Robinson, conducted an in-depth study in which he discovered strong historical, textual, and logical evidence for dating all of the gospels between AD 40–65.² And Robinson was no friend of conservative biblical Christianity, being a liberal New Testament scholar. Evidence from a contrary source is always helpful. Based on these dates, Matthew, Mark, and Luke would have written about the darkness a mere 7 to 32 years after the actual event.
- As far as ancient historical accounts go, this is like a news flash! The Roman historian, Suetonius, wrote his account of Caesar crossing the Rubicon at least 110 years after the event, and it is considered to be generally reliable. The earliest biographies of Alexander the Great, by Arrian and Plutarch, were written over 400 years after his death, and they are considered trustworthy accounts.
- German NT scholar Rudolph Pesch dates the source for Mark's passion narrative no later than AD 37 based on language, style, grammar, and personal references.³ That's just four years after the event! It can be conclusively stated that the Gospel accounts of the darkness at the crucifixion are extremely early, reliable, and based on direct eyewitnesses.

² Robinson, John A.T., *Re-dating the New Testament*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000.

³ Strobel, L. *The Case for Christ*, p. 220, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1998

– **The External Evidence**

- *The following is a presentation of two ancient pagans historians (Thallus and Phlagon) who wrote about the events of the darkness and the earthquake on the date and/or time of the crucifixion, as experienced around the known world at that time.*
- *It is also an evaluation of the renowned Julius Africanus, the early 3rd century historian (he wrote a five volume history of the world). What is evaluated are his qualifications especially as regarding his use of the writings of earlier historian, Thallus, who wrote about the darkness.*

– ***The body of the total internal and external evidence is 13 pages and can be read/downloaded in PDF at: www.gracebiblewoodvalley.org/good-reads/ and scroll down to Evidence (internal and external) for the darkness and earthquake at the resurrection.***

–

– *Very important/relevant info we have placed in a frame, like this.*

--Thallus (c. 50-75ad)

A third-century historian, Julius Africanus, composed a *History of the World* down to around ad. 220 in five volumes. In one of the surviving fragments, Julius discussed the three-hour darkness which occurred at the crucifixion of Jesus and makes this comment:

In the third book of his history, Thallus calls this darkness an eclipse of the sun--wrongly in my opinion. (5.50)

In order to assess the strength of this evidence, I will look at a several issues:

- What do we know about this Thallus?
- What was the historical context of this remark?
- What was the background of Julius Africanus?
- Do we have any reasons to believe that Julius was *qualified* as a historian, esp. in his use of Thallus' statement?
- What conclusions might we draw from this?

.....
What do we know about this Thallus? We have two possible other extra-Africanus references to him. **One**, Historian Eusebius tells us that this Thallus wrote in Greek an account of world history from the fall of Troy down to the mid-first century--c.52 CE. Thallus' work is generally believed to have been written in the period 50-100 CE.[Murray Harris, JSOTGP5:344]

Two, Josephus POSSIBLY refers to a certain Thallus as a wealthy Samaritan freedman of Tiberius (d. 37CE) who had lent a million drachmas to the bankrupt Herod Agrippa. (Ant 18.167):

Now there was one Thallus, a freedman of Caesar's of whom he borrowed a million of dracmae, and thence repaid Antonia the debt he owed her; and by spending the overplus in paying his court to Caius, became a person of great authority with him.

If these two are the same Thallus, then it would explain several things for us:

1. how he had TIME to write a history
2. how he had ACCESS to records (being a close associate of Tiberias)
3. how he had KNOWLEDGE of events in Palestine (being a Samaritan)
4. how he had the financial means to do the heavy travel REQUIRED/EXPECTED to do history in those days (cf. [NTLE:81](#))

In fact, the requirements for writing Hellenistic history (as opposed to Roman history) would necessitate a background like that mentioned by Josephus. So Fornara in [NHAGR:49](#):

Polybius...fairly represents the great tradition of *historia*. The hallmark of the profession was personal observation (autopsy), inquiry, and travel. Now these

conditions excluded all but the members of the highest levels of society. Wealth and social contacts were essential to their craft. The nature of what historians intended to investigate...required mobility, familiarity with the great, and the prestige necessary to ensure the cooperation of strangers.

According to Murray Harris (op. cit.) the identification of these two individuals is favored by E. Schurer, R. Eisler, and M. Goguel. [This identification, however, is not necessary to our argument.]

But Julius himself gives us additional information about Thallus--he is mentioned two other times BEFORE this reference:

And after 70 years of captivity, Cyrus became king of the Persians at the time of the 55th Olympiad, as may be ascertained from the *Bibliothecae* of Diodorus and the histories of Thallus and Castor, and also from Polybius and Phlegon, and others besides these, who have made the Olympiads a subject of study. (XIII.2)

And

For these things are also recorded by the Athenian historians Hellanicus and Philochorus, who record Attic affairs; and by Castor and Thallus, who record Syrian affairs; and by Diodorus, who writes a universal history in his *Bibliothecae*; and by Alexander Polyhistr, and by some of our own time, yet more carefully...(XIII.3)

Whoever this Thallus is, he is in GOOD company as far as historians go! He is included in lists of historians that are considered innovative (e.g. Hellanicus--cf. [HAMM:10](#); Castor--cf. [HAMM:59](#)) and the most methodologically scrupulous (e.g. Polybius--cf. [BAFCSALS:5-8](#), most std. works on ancient historiography--HAMM, EAMH). He is linked twice with Castor of Rhodes, who set the format for most of subsequent historical writing--the 'comparative columns' format (adapted by Africanus)--cf. [HAMM:59](#). He is said to have focused on Syrian history (perhaps evidence for a Samaritan background?), and to have been the author of a work on 'historia' (more on this term later).

Whoever he was, our first impulse MUST BE to take Thallus seriously as a historian!

What other data elements do we have? He was obviously of a generation earlier than Julius, judging by the contrast with 'those of our own time'. This, of course, fits well with the dates given above. Eusebius tells us he wrote his history in Greek, and that it was a 'summary' from the Fall of Troy until the 167 Olympiad [Note: the 167 Olympiad fell in the 112-109BC timeframe, so this individual either wrote an addendum to his main work, or Eusebius' date should be amended to 207 (c.50-53ad), as per Harris].

Now, if we look at the quote under discussion in the larger context, some other items are suggested:

On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his *History*, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun. For the Hebrews celebrate the passover on the ⁴14th day according to the moon, and the passion of our Savior falls on the day before the passover; but an eclipse of the sun takes place only when the moon comes under the sun. And it cannot happen at any other time but in the interval between the first day of the new moon and the last of the old, that is, at their junction: how then should an eclipse be supposed to happen when the moon is almost diametrically opposite the sun? Let opinion pass however; let it carry the majority with it; and let this portent of the world be deemed an eclipse of the sun, like others a portent only to the eye. Phlegon records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth--manifestly that one of which we speak. But what has an eclipse in common with an earthquake, the rending rocks, and the resurrection of the dead, and so great a perturbation throughout the universe? Surely no such event as this is recorded for a long period. (XVIII.1)

There are several things to notice from this passage:

1. The phrase 'this darkness' (*touto to skotos*) makes it clear that Thallus was attempting to account SPECIFICALLY for the darkness surrounding the crucifixion.
2. The phrase "let it carry the majority" probably indicates that a 'majority' of historians accounted for it thus, IMPLYING that MANY MORE such explanations were circulating! In

⁴ E Peterman: Africanus states the passover in relation to the 14th of Nisan awkwardly here, but the essentials are present. He states it this way because of the Jewish reckoning of a day, which is sundown to sundown. The slaying of the Passover lamb is on the afternoon of the 14th but consumption of the lamb (he calls this sacrifice, "celebrate the passover") continues into the evening, past sundown, which by the Jewish measurement is the 15th Nisan., but by Greek/Latin measurement is still the 14th. The *feast* associated with the Passover, however, begins on the day following, on the 15th. Africanus also states that, "the passion of our Savior falls on the day before the passover" and by this he means the daytime of the 14th since the consumption celebration is in the evening, which is the start of the 15th, by Jewish reckoning..

other words, the strange darkness was REAL and a topic of scholarly discussion.

3. The phrase "portent only to the eye" indicates that some argued that it was strictly a mass visual hallucination (but still requiring scholarly explanation).

4. Another historian **Phlegon** recorded this event as well, specifying the very HOURS OF THE EVENT! (Phlegon was another freedman of the emperor, who wrote a 14-book history--cf. [CAE:118](#)). The wording of Julius' remark here suggests that Phlegon was merely reporting the phenomenon, without referring to Jesus.

This Phlegon, who wrote an *extensive* chronology around AD 137 says of the event ,
"In the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad (i.e., AD 33)⁵ there was 'the greatest eclipse of the sun' and that 'it became night in the sixth hour of the day [i.e., noon] so that stars even appeared in the heavens. There was a great earthquake in Bithynia, and many things were overturned in Nicaea.⁶"

5. The phrase "let this portent of the world be deemed an eclipse of the sun..." indicates that what is under discussion is NOT the factuality of the event, but the EXPLANATION of it. In other words, Thallus is EXPLAINING the occurrence of the darkness--NOT 'documenting' it (contra G. A. Wells, [DJE:13](#)) as was Phlegon.
6. Harris (op.cit.) points out one of the implications of Julius' word choice here:

It is clear that Thallus was not merely documenting an eclipse of the sun that took place in the reign of Tiberius, as G.A. Wells alleges....If Africanus were simply questioning the accuracy of Thallus in claiming that an eclipse had occurred at a certain time, he would not have rejected Thallus' view by an expression of *opinion*--'(wrongly) it seems to me'. What he was rejecting was a naturalistic explanation of the darkness not an alleged occurrence of a solar eclipse. He proceeds to point out that Thallus' explanation was unsatisfactory because an eclipse of the sun is impossible at the time of the full moon.

7. [One might also notice that Thallus is singled out for Africanus' rebuttal; Phlegon, who seems merely to be chronicling the event, is accosted for INCOMPLETENESS--not inaccuracy, even though Thallus and Phlegon are BOTH said to be talking about an 'eclipse'. They are obviously arguing two different things, and NOT both merely documenting an eclipse (contra Wells, again.) In fact, Phlegon's witness is probably used--from literary structure--as a refutation of the preceding clause "a portent ONLY to the eyes". An appeal to a public record like that would make sense in the literary context.]
8. It is also important to note that Julius calls Thallus' work a *historia* and not some other general term for literary works. The import of this for our discussion is that it explains why (1) Julius' is taking Thallus seriously; and (2) why Thallus is dealing with the

⁵ The olympics started in 776BC. An *Olympiad* was measured in 4 years (1 *Olympiad* = 4 yrs). So 202 full *Olympiads* (since it was in the 4th year of the 202nd) X 4 = 808 years. 808 - 776BC = 32) + 1 year for the fact that there is no zero year = 33AD.

⁶ Nicaea was in Bythinia, (NW Turkey today, by the Bosphorus Straits and NW of Ankara) a distance of some 600 miles from Jerusalem! This was no ordinary, nor natural quake!

astronomical issue of the darkness. Since the earliest days of historiography--even as far back as Xanthos of Lydia (5th century BC), writers had attempted to 'anchor' their chronologies and explanations on potentially dateable events such as earthquakes, floods, etc. (cf. [HAMM](#): 10). For example, Thucydides (*The Peloponnesian War*) correlates events to seasons of the year (e.g. 2.31.1) and astronomical events (e.g. 2.78.2). These types of events were kept in public archives (e.g. *annales, acta populi* in Rome, who probably patterned the idea after Greek practice--cf. [NHAGR](#):57, n12.) and were easily accessible to researchers. Indeed, these archives were so full of minutia, that 'high brow' literary types scorned the seeming trivialities of the record. So, the Roman censor Cato (b.184 BCE) could complain:

It is disagreeable to write what stands in the tablet at the house of the *pontifex maximus*--how often grain was costly, how often darkness or something else blocked the light of the moon or the sun. ([NHAGR](#):24)

[The exactitude of the younger Phlegon's reference to 3 hours of darkness may have been based on such public records, and would have been a perfectly adequate evidentialist counter-argument to the "portent ONLY to the eyes" explanation of the darkness.]

.....

What was the historical context for this remark Africanus by? At the time of his writing, anti-Christians had already been explaining the darkness at the time of the crucifixion as a purely natural phenomenon--an eclipse. Origen, for example, had already hinted in his writings that this idea of it being an eclipse was an invention of the pagans to discredit the Gospels ([DM](#):1040, n.17).

The passage in Africanus occurs in the discussion as to the darkness that accompanied the Crucifixion of Jesus. The phrase 'this darkness' indicates that Thallus was referring to (in HIS history) the events surrounding the death of Jesus. It is clear from this passage that both Julius AND Thallus took it for granted that Jesus died (and therefore existed!).

What I find interesting about the existence of this interchange is the context of Julius' purpose in writing. He is writing a HISTORY/CHRONOLOGY, not an APOLOGETIC *per se*. He is trying to anchor dates and merge biblical chronology with the chronologies of Greece, Rome, etc. In this effort, he is much more concerned about proving that the darkness was NOT an eclipse than that it was a supernatural event. The chronology needs to be consistent with astronomical data (as required for ALL good 'historia'). His concern is historical TRUTH, not theology.

.....

What was the background of Julius Africanus?

Let's begin by noting some of the events and activities of his life ([CTEC](#):103, [Schaff](#):I.191; [PAC](#):307):

- A native of Jerusalem (Aelia)
- Socialized with King Abgar IV the Great at Edessa
- Visited Ararat in search of Noah's ark
- Visited Dead Sea and Jacob's terebinth in Palestine

- Travelled to Rome as embassy from Emmaus
- "At Rome he so impressed the Emperor Alexander Severus (222-35) by his erudition that the emperor entrusted him with the building of his library at the Pantheon in Rome" (CTEC:103)--NOTICE: this is pre-Constantine!
- Wrote a miscellany, similar in content to Pliny's *Natural History*, dedicated to Severus.
- Did work in textual criticism of Homer's works: "he knew various manuscripts of Homer which lay in civic libraries from the old site of Jerusalem to that fine city Nysa in Caria" (PAC:307)
- "Africanus was the first Christian whose writings were not all concerned with his faith." (CTEC:103)
- "He was not an ecclesiastic, as far as we know, but a philosopher who pursued his favorite studies after conversion and made them useful to the church." (Schaff)
- He knew Hebrew, and of course Greek.
- The later Christian historian Socrates classes him for learning with Clement of Alexandria and Origen!
- His Chronicle is the foundation of medieval historiography of the world and the church.
- "He made the first attempt at a systematic chronicle of sacred and profane history" (Schaff)
- He had literary critical skills and was honest enough to use them (and confront others on even matters of 'sacred cows!')--"He once attended a theological disputation during which Origen appealed to the History of Susanna, and afterwards wrote to Origen a fatherly rebuke for failing to notice that the pun, being only possible in Greek, proves the History of Susanna to be an addition to the original book of Daniel." (CTEC:103).

Robin Lane Fox cites him as an example of the best educated dual-culture products of his day--one in which the best of culture was expressed (PAC, op.cit.)

Do we have any reasons to believe that Julius was QUALIFIED as a historian?

There are three questions we could raise to 'check' Africanus:

- Does his background lead us to believe he had the requisite skills, resources, and access to information necessary to do 'history'?
- Did subsequent historians consider him 'reliable' (a sort of 'peer review') as a historian?
- Do his works manifest historical rigor and historiographical integrity, in such a way as to lead us to 'trust' him?

Let's look at each of these.

The first one--on data from his background--we have already looked at above. But let's note the items that are relevant to our current issue:

- He traveled widely (in the model of rigorous historians of the day)
- He built an imperial library in Rome (giving him access to sources and materials)
- He was a favorite of the Emperor (perhaps giving him access to 'rare and privileged' info)
- He had a broad, semi-scientific approach (rel. to the day--*a la Natural History*)
- He had skills in textual criticism (important for studying ancient sources)
- He had a knowledge of many libraries (important for finding sources)
- He had literary critical skills (as evidenced in his skirmish with Origen)
- He had excellent linguistic skills in Greek.
- He stood solidly in the middle of the best traditions of ancient historiography: He used the comparative columns technique of Castor ([HAMM:57](#)), the universal history approach of Hellanicus ([HAMM:10](#)), and used the official-list approach to chronology (e.g. he added bishop-lists to the earlier sources' king-lists; EAM:110).
- He had a commitment to truth (at least in the area of historical documents) adequate to 'take on' the establish church and its most intellectually-intimidating leader (i.e. Origen)

Just to give an idea of how detail-oriented and appropriately critical he was, let me quote Bruce's account of the Origen-Africanus exchange ([BCANON: 76](#)):

Julius Africanus, born in Jerusalem, was a contemporary and friend of Origen. About AD 238 he read a controversial work by Origen in which appeal was made to the *History of Susanna*, one of the Septuagintal additions to Daniel, as though it were an integral part of Daniel. He spent some time considering his matter and preparing relevant arguments; then he sent a respectful letter to Origen in which he questioned the propriety of using the as though it belonged to the authentic book of Daniel. It was evident, he pointed out, that the *History of Susanna* was originally written in Greek, because the crux of the story turned on a double pun which was possible only in Greek. In the story Daniel conducts a separate examination of each of the two false witnesses against Susanna and asks under what kind of tree her alleged offence was committed; he receives inconsistent answers and pronounces an appropriate doom against each. To the one who specifies a mastic tree (Gk 'schino') he says, 'God will cut you in two' ('schizo-'); to the one who specifies a holm-oak (Gk. 'prinos') he says, 'God will saw you asunder' (Gk. 'prio-'). At one time Origen himself had acknowledged the force of this argument...

I find this instructive. In it we see Julius making 'source critical' decisions on the basis of linguistic and literary criteria! He was NOT content to accept 'tradition' but thought carefully and critically.

The second one--on how subsequent historians assessed/used him.

Again, from above we saw how he was used by ALL succeeding historians (e.g. Eusebius, Socrates), by even his contemporaries (e.g. Hippolytus), and that his work formed the foundation of medieval historiography . Even the comment adduced by Robin Lane Fox above supports his overall credibility.

A very important piece of data comes from the antagonist side! When one of the most effective critics of Christianity in the ancient world--Porphyry--decides to rebut Christianity, he picked Origen and Julius as his targets! What a compliment to their credibility.

The third one--on data from his actual works--can be seen by a simple survey of relevant quotes from his *Chronicle*. Let's look at several of these, and ask questions about their implications.

- *The Egyptians, indeed, with their boastful notions of their own antiquity, have put forth a sort of account of it by the hand of their astrologers in cycles and myriads of years; which some of those who have had the repute of studying such subjects profoundly have in a summary way called lunar years; and inclining no less than others to the mythical, they think they fall in with the eight or nine thousands of years which the Egyptian priests in Plato falsely reckon up to Solon. (I)*

Notice: (1) he does NOT dignify the Egyptian accounts with the title 'history' but with 'sort of account'; (2) he makes a pejorative statement about someone being 'inclined to the mythical', and (3) he compares this with a specific text in Plato. He certainly seems to be more interested in historical truth, than in mythology--a predisposition towards accuracy.

- *When men multiplied on the earth, the angels of heaven came together with the daughters of men. In some copies I found "the sons of God." What is meant by the Spirit, in my opinion, is that the descendants of Seth are called the sons of God..." (II)*

Notice: (1) He opts for a 'naturalistic' explanation of the Gen 6 passage over the 'supernatural' one; (2) He has compared source texts and found 'better' readings; and (3) he has couched his point of view with uncertainty (and humility)--"in my opinion", indicating that he observes a difference between fact and opinion.

- *And when the water abated, the ark settled on the mountains of Ararat, which we know to be in Parthia; but some say that they are at Celaenae of Phrygia, and I have seen both places. (IV)*

Notice: JA traveled to both sites, as a 'proper' historian was supposed to do. In this case, when the data was divided, he visited BOTH sites.

- *And some say that the staff of one of the angels who were entertained by Abraham was planted there. (X)*

Notice that JA is careful to qualify the remark with a 'some say' (= the modern 'allegedly?'), indicating an unconfirmed report. He took the time to make sure his reader was NOT misled as to the certainty of his source!

- *And after Ogygus, on account of the vast destruction caused by the flood, the present land of Attica remained without a king till the time of Cecrops, 189 years. Philochorus, however, affirms that Ogygus, Actaeus, or whatever fictitious name is adduced never existed. (XII)*

Notice: JA is careful to make sure his reader KNOWS where the uncertainty of the mythological lies, even citing the specific scholar who takes a very strong stance.

- *Up to the time of the Olympiads there is no certain history among the Greeks, all things before that date being confused and in no way consistent with each other. But these Olympiads were thoroughly investigated by many, as the Greeks made up the records of their history not according to long spaces, but in periods of four years. For which reason I shall select the most remarkable of the mythical narratives before the time of the first Olympiad, and rapidly run over them. But those after that period, at least those that are notable, I shall take together, Hebrew events in connection with Greek, according to their dates, examining carefully the affairs... (XIII.1)*

NOTICE: (1) He knows the difference between 'certain' and 'uncertain' history; (2) he values consistency of records/accounts; (3) he knows that 'many' have investigated the Greek history; (4) he knows of the Greek 'records' of their history; (5) he knows the difference between 'mythical' and 'non-mythical' narratives; (6) he knows to spend little time on the 'mythical' and to concentrate on those matters that have been more 'thoroughly investigated'; (7) he commits to 'examining carefully' the data. This sounds like careful historical method to me.

- *And after the 70 years of captivity, Cyrus became king of the Persians at the time of the 55th Olympiad, as may be ascertained from the "Bibliothecae" of Diodorus and the histories of Thallus and Castor, and also from Polybius and Phlegon, and others besides these, who have made the Olympiads a subject of study. For the date is a matter of agreement among them all. (XIII.2)*

Notice: (1) JA documents his statement, by citing some of the most important records of his time!; (2) he refers to 'others' meaning he even consulted OTHER resources as well; (3) he points out that they all agree--he knows that agreement of disparate sources is an important historical piece of evidence; (4) Diodorus, Castor, and Polybius are some of the biggest names in ancient Historiography! (Notice also that Thallus is included in this list). JA was certainly at home in the methods, records, and content of the major scholars in his field.

- *For these things are also recorded by the Athenian historians Hellanicus and Philochorus, who record Attic affairs; and by Castor and Thallus, who record Syrian affairs; and by Diodorus, who writes a universal history in his Bibliothecae; and by Alexander Polyhistr, and by some of our own time, yet more carefully...(XIII.3)*

Notice: (1) to the "who's who" list above is added Hellanicus, another 'big name' in ancient historiography; (2) he is aware of the fields of specialization of the scholars; (3) he is familiar with contemporary writers as well; (4) he indicates that his contemporaries have a greater methodological rigor; (5) Thallus is again mentioned, and contrasted with those of 'our own time.'

- *For Philochorus asserts that...Polemo, for instance, in the first book of his "Greek History," says...And Apion the son of Poseidonius, the most laborious of grammarians, in his book "Against the Jews," and in the fourth book of his "History," says that...And Herodotus also makes mention of this revolt...And Ptolemy the Mendesian, who narrates the history of the Egyptians from the earliest times, gives the same account of all these things... (XIII.6)*

Notice: (1) JA gives us a string of citations from the best practitioners of history,

citing even the book and location in some cases--he KNEW the material; (2)he had NO QUALMS about using an 'enemy of the faith' (e.g. Apion) as a reliable source, even citing two different locations in his works(!)--no 'ostrich in the sand' Christian reader was he!

- *As far, then, as is in our power, we have taken the Scripture, I think, correctly; (XVIII.4)*

Notice: JA qualified his remark here with a "I think"--he knew and practiced the difference between fact and opinion.

This seems quite rigorous and very 'modern' (in a positive sense, of course) to me. I find here a historian of immense scholarship--comfortable and competent in both ancient and contemporary works--with critical thinking skills, access to the best materials, ability to appraise his sources carefully, deeply sensitive to 'levels of certainty' in historical conclusions, and non-biased in his use of subject-matter experts.

I am not sure what additional criteria could be advanced to argue that his value as a historian is low, and that his use of Thallus' work (and the quote) is somehow questionable. He demonstrates the highest standards of balanced scholarship and integrity I have seen among the ancient authors. [I find absolutely NO basis in the text for Grant's accusation that his *Chronographies* are 'full of mathematical symbolism and fantasy'! (cf. [GRH:117](#)). I am frankly puzzled at such a statement--having gone through this work many, many times during this writing...its ONLY 7 pages long! I would assume there are probably SOME problems in his writings, but to use the phrase "full of" is a gross exaggeration, bordering on misrepresentation.]

Credit to Glenn Miller, 1996, The Christian Think-Tank for his contribution to external evidence analysis.
<http://christianthinktank.com/jrthal.html>