

*This narrative was submitted to Sea of Faith New Zealand,
in March of 2014, for website publication
by Archie Thomson of Auckland*

REPORT:

Execution of a Galilean Terrorist

Editor's Note

Some time in the late seventeenth century a book entitled *Witness of the Rebel Jew* was privately printed and distributed among friends of the author, who identified himself only as “a gentleman of letters”. It is not known how many copies were printed, perhaps only about twenty, and the only copy known to exist in recent times was apparently stolen from a library in Oxford in around 1980. Subsequently a text purporting to be that of *Witness of the Rebel Jew* appeared briefly on a website. Someone had used optical character recognition (OCR) to scan the text into digital form, but only the first few pages had been properly edited, and the remainder contained many asterisks, indicating a failure by the OCR software to identify individual letters – this applied especially to words that were probably in italics in the original book.

The “gentleman of letters” claimed that *Witness of the Rebel Jew* was a translation he had made from an old parchment document written in ancient Greek, which he had acquired clandestinely while in Venice. However there are indications that his English translation was not taken directly from a Greek source – it’s possible that the “gentleman of letters” meant that he had translated from a Latin or Italian version, itself alleged to be from a Greek papyrus original.

Despite calling himself a man of letters, the translator (or author) of this work wrote in a very stilted and obscure prose style. This Report is an attempt to modernise the language of *Witness of the Rebel Jew* for the twenty-first century reader.

Unfortunately the file of the text (downloaded from the Internet) of *Witness of the Rebel Jew* was stored on a disk that has, because of a foolish blunder with a computer, become corrupted, and it is now unrecoverable.

**Report submitted by "Marcus Antiochus"
on the Execution of the Galilean Terrorist
(delivered anonymously to the Commission)**

To the members of the Senatorial Investigating Commission. Greetings to your lordships from your most humble servant. And may the life of our divine First Citizen, Nero Claudius, be a long and happy one.

I want to stress that this testimony is freely given and for no reward. I have asked a young friend of mine who is good with the pen to write it out for me. I have retired from Imperial service, with a modest nest-egg, but at no time did I ever receive money or any other inducement to persuade me to neglect my duty to the Roman Republic. I have changed my name and appearance, and now live quietly in a secluded locality. The commissioners who were searching for me did not find me, and I believe could not. News came to me that people were asking questions about my role in the counter-terrorist initiatives at Jerusalem, and I considered that it might be prudent to set the record straight. A man can never be too careful when it comes to preserving his good name - at least for as long as he is alive. What people say about him after he's dead doesn't matter.

I mention that I am not concerned to put what is called my side of the story, since I have never been accused of any wrongdoing. I know more about the facts of this case than anyone else, and I warn anyone who might attempt to fabricate some story that could reflect unfavourably on myself, that although I have enemies, I also have very influential friends, men not to be trifled with.

My name was Markos. I did not have a second name, let alone a third name. I liked to call myself Marcus Antiochus. It sounded like a good name, as if perhaps I might be related to the old Greek emperors that some people call Seleucids. It was an anonymous sort of name: Markos from Antioch - there's dozens of men in Antioch called Markos.

I always referred to myself as a Greek. After all, I look like a Greek and speak modern Greek as well as any man, and I can read it reasonably well, although of course I cannot easily read the classical language of the Golden Age. But were any of my ancestors real Greeks? Probably not. My earliest memory is of living on the streets of Damascus, begging, stealing, sometimes earning a small sum for guarding a trader's stall to prevent others from robbing him.

I don't know who first called me Markos. It was already my name when I met a man, an Armenian I think, called Demetrios. He controlled one of the markets, on an unofficial basis. He told me I was a smart kid, who could learn. And he taught me. If he, or one of his cronies, caught me stealing, I got a whipping. But if I brought him some useful information, he would reward me with treats, and allow me to sleep at the back of a bakery. I soon learned that a skilful informer makes more out of crime than an unskilful thief. The destiny of the unsuccessful thief is the unceasing agony of a galley oar.

I mention these facts about my early life in order to explain how it came about that I eventually had the honour to serve the Republic as the Security Liaison Officer Jerusalem Sector.

Some people don't realise that liaison officers are the men who really run the security service. Unofficially I had the equivalent rank of centurion, but not the status or the pay. However there were ways of supplementing my income. Of course the uniformed officers looked down on my sort. If I was lucky, they called me by a crude slang expression that meant "spy".

The year was 785 in the time of Tiberius. It seems that some people don't even know when these events were supposed to have taken place. But a good memory is essential in my line of work - where you have to remember exactly what each person is supposed to know, so that you can catch them out when they're lying, or when they're pretending not to know something.

At the beginning of spring the Governor arrived from Caesarea with about four hundred fresh troops. There were Spaniards, Gauls, and some others that spoke little Latin and hardly any Greek. There were also some Macedonians, who looked as if they might be more use. The whole lot were squeezed into the city barracks, and then they were taken out on patrols, until they were thoroughly familiar with the layout of the place.

The big event we were preparing for was the equinox pilgrimage known as the Passover. This was supposed to commemorate some liberation of the Jewish ancestors from Egypt hundreds of years ago, but in reality it was only an excuse for dreaming about how to break away from Rome's benevolent regime of law and order. When they talked about "Moses" they really mean some mythical saviour called "Messias", and when they talked about "Pharoah" they really mean "Caesar" (may the gods preserve him). Of course, as part of my job, I had to take all this nonsense seriously.

Thousands of Jews arrived from all over the Mediterranean, but most of these "foreign Jews" weren't the real problem. Jews that lived in Asia, Greece, Egypt and places like that wouldn't gain much from a revolt in Judea, even if it were successful, and they also understood clearly the power of the Roman state. On the other hand, some of those provincials in Judea had never seen a full sized legion doing their battle order drills.

The people who could cause serious difficulties were trouble-makers from the desert country on the eastern side of the Jordan River. They were usually referred to by the authorities as "brigands", because they raided outlying farms and villages to get food, knives and so on. Then they went to Jerusalem at festival times, pretending to be pilgrims. But their real intention was to start a riot, and during the confusion kill Romans and foreigners. They were deluding themselves when they imagined a war of liberation, but nonetheless they were capable of doing a great deal of damage, with loss of life and reduced political stability.

The situation in the Far East was clearly understood by all well-informed persons. The real threat were the Parthians, who had defeated Roman armies in the past. The Commander-in-Chief, Far Eastern Forces, with the title Legate of Syria had his main headquarters and garrison at Damascus. He had two deputies, the governors at Antioch and Caesarea, to watch his back, as the saying is. If the Parthians attacked us, it would be a suitable time for a revolt in Judea. Conversely, if there was a revolt in Judea, it'd be a suitable time for the Parthians to attack. Ask

anyone who knows, and they'll tell you that the Security Liaison Officer Jerusalem Sector is an important factor in keeping the peace in the Far East. I don't know who has the job now, but if he doesn't perform his duties properly there could be riots, massacres and warfare.

As I said, we were well prepared by the time pilgrims started to show up for the Passover. Some experienced auxiliary troops had also arrived, with their horses, from Damascus and Caesarea, and they set up two small camps to the west of the city. There were usually disputes over the amount of compensation that the army pays to farmers for forage, but there had been quite good rain that spring and the pasture situation was not serious. I mention these details to show how thorough you need to be as a security liaison officer. Trouble can start anywhere, with some quite trivial incident, and before you know it, the situation has got completely out of hand.

There were, as might be expected, quite a few meetings to attend. Some of these were conducted personally by the Governor, Pontius Pilate. I usually sat at the back, saying as little as possible, while army officers did most of the talking. I encouraged them to talk, so as to find out how little they knew, and then I would have private discussions with each of them later. They usually resented the fact that I knew more about the situation than they did, but they would resent it much more if I were to correct their mistakes in front of others at a meeting. I mention these techniques to show how much tact you need to have if you're going to be a security liaison officer.

As you know, I worked for the Governor. But Herod Antipas also had a security commander in his city of Tiberias. This man called himself Jonas, but I don't know what his real name was. I met him several times, discreetly of course. He didn't come to Jerusalem on the occasion we're discussing, but he sent his deputy, a man called Jude. This was when I first heard about the Galilean terrorist Jeshua, or Jesus as he would be called in Greek. I've been asked the question, "How did I know he was a terrorist?" I'll admit that I didn't know, not at first hand. But you have to trust your colleagues. If they seem to have some good information, you go with it. A few innocent people get punished by mistake, but that goes with the territory.

I didn't have any doubts at the time that what I did was the correct thing. And I don't have any serious doubts now. And this is why. Jude said that some of their paid informers had been following this Jeshua around, listening to what he said when he "prophesied" to some crowds of people. Perhaps he was just one of those rabbis, with a religious message. But maybe not. It seemed that he was some kind of convert or disciple of John the Baptist.

Now I was familiar with the case of John the Baptist. He operated something called a redemption mission at a crossing point on the Jordan River in Galilee. In case you're not familiar with this redemption mission thing, what happened was this. The rabbi told people to repent for their sins, and there was a symbolic washing away in the river and a renewal of purity. Sufficient to say that the Jews do a lot more of this ritual purification than most races. A Roman goes to the bathhouse to get his body clean and chat with friends, do gymnastics and so on. A Greek goes to the bathhouse to pick up young men, and of course get his body clean and so on. But a wealthy

Jewish priest is likely to have a private water cistern in a special room under his house, and he desires to have spiritual cleanliness more than a clean body. So you don't usually see a devout Jew wandering around in a bathhouse, wearing all the clothes that he was born in. He would think nudity a most shameful offence to his god. These cultural differences had quite a lot to do with the case of John the Baptist.

As is well known, the Herodian family, going back to Herod the Great, were not pure Jews, even though they liked to call themselves "King of the Jews". And they certainly didn't behave like Jews, except in a few ceremonials. They were what you would call international or cosmopolitan, more Greek than Jewish. Herod Antipas had the title Tetrarch because he ruled over four territories, the most important of which was Galilee. His court sponsored gymnastics and other activities in the Greek style, with young fellows showing off their physique and athletic ability. It seems that in his preaching John the Baptist had said that Herod Antipas was not fit to rule over Jews, because he took part in all this so-called immodesty and offensive behaviour. Informers reported this subversive preaching to Herod's security department.

But soon John the Baptist got himself into real trouble. Herod Antipas took a fancy to the wife of one of his half-brothers, who was also called Herod. I realise that this is beginning to sound rather confusing. This woman's name was Herodias. So Herod Antipas forced this other Herod to divorce Herodias, and he divorced his own wife, and then he married Herodias. Well, kings can do this sort of thing, even client kings. You might think that this action could possibly have been condemned as unjust, in that Herod Antipas abused his power as Tetrarch to force his half-brother to give up his wife. But it seems that it was not injustice that concerned John the Baptist.

I mention these finer points to show how a security liaison officer has to be an expert on the customs and religious laws of the place where he works. Apparently in Jewish religious law it is considered incestuous to marry a woman who has been married to your brother or half-brother, even if she is a widow. So when Herod Antipas married Herodias, it was as if he had married his own sister, even though she wasn't what we would call a "blood relation". I hope I've explained this clearly.

When John the Baptist preached a condemnation of this marriage, which he said was incestuous in strict Jewish religious law, Herod Antipas had him locked up in prison. This is where I became involved in the case. Herod Antipas wanted to execute John the Baptist by beheading, but for some reason he couldn't do this without Pilate's permission. He wrote to Pilate requesting permission, and Pilate happened to mention this request to me. I pointed out that Herod, who was only what we call a "client king", could not legally execute a man who had truthfully preached the Jewish religious law. Pilate agreed, although this may have been because he had quarrelled with Herod over some other unrelated matter. Pilate went on to explain to me something that I already knew: that Jewish religious law had a special status in Judea and Galilee, which was protected by the Roman state. It might have been possible for Herod Antipas to execute this holy man without

starting a riot in Galilee, but he also had a palace in Jerusalem, and the next time he visited the city, there might be angry demonstrations by young hotheads. You've got to think of these things, when you're in a place like Jerusalem.

But then Herod Antipas did the sort of thing that sometimes made him unpopular. He appealed directly to the Legate in Damascus. He claimed that the preaching of John the Baptist was not in accordance with some customs in the Jewish Torah, which in Greek is called Pentateuch. Herod also said that what John the Baptist was preaching undermined his political position as Tetrarch, and therefore undermined the power of Rome in the Levant. The Legate agreed with Herod Antipas and authorised the execution, which was promptly carried out. The Legate sent a note to Pilate, advising him of this decision. I wasn't present when this note arrived, but I gather Pilate wasn't very pleased.

Of course Pilate didn't care whether John the Baptist lived or died. It was the principle of the thing. And it might also have been a security risk. I mention these niceties of politics to show how a security liaison officer is not (as some say) a mere thug, but needs to be sensitive to public opinion, even the opinions of subject peoples.

This takes us back to the point where Jude the deputy commander of Herod's security service arrived in Jerusalem and advised me to keep a lookout for this Jeshua. He assured me that the message preached by Jeshua was political rather than spiritual. Perhaps there was malice here. Perhaps they condemned Jeshua because of his association with John the Baptist. But probably not. Even though I would not trust Herod Antipas to do the sensible thing, I would be inclined to trust his security people.

The problem was that there were hundreds of Galileans arriving for the Passover, and staying with relatives all over the city and in the surrounding villages. But on the third day before the Sabbath (which is the sacred seventh day of the Jews) I received two items of information. It was reported that Jeshua had earlier been seen approaching Jerusalem in company with a group of Galileans, and later that day I heard that there had been a minor disturbance at the Temple. You have to realise that during the sacred ceremonials of the Jews the Temple in Jerusalem is turned into a slaughterhouse. Thousands of pilgrims purchase animals and birds, which are then ritually sacrificed to the god. I don't know what exactly happened at the Temple on this occasion. It seems that Jeshua tried to preach to the crowd, about how the priests had turned the religious observances of the Jews into a money-making racket. Naturally this would not have gone down well with the Temple authorities, and the Temple guards promptly saw him off the premises.

I couldn't ignore the warnings that I had received from Herod's security people. That evening there was a meeting with Pilate, at which several officers reported on the performance of their units. The atmosphere was generally calm, but we were all on edge. If we could just get through the next few days without any trouble, a lot of these pilgrims would head back home, and everything could settle back into the normal routine.

After the meeting was concluded I said to Pilate, "A Galilean has arrived in Jerusalem, Jeshua of Nazareth, a trouble-maker, a rabble-rouser, possibly a terrorist. If we catch him doing anything wrong, I'll make an example of him."

I don't know why people keep thinking they need to explain everything to me. "All right, but not on the Sabbath," he said, "preferably before the Sabbath. And he doesn't need to be doing anything specific. If you've got him in custody and there's any trouble, any sort of trouble at all, then make an example of this Jeshua of Nazareth and anyone associated with him. And anybody else who steps out of line." He made a sign with his fingers indicating crucifixion.

Next day I had my people alerted to look for Jeshua, but there was no sign of him. They didn't really know what he looked like, and of course they didn't want to draw attention to themselves by asking too many questions. That morning some soldiers arrested a couple of men who were behaving suspiciously. It turned out that they were entering the city with daggers concealed under their garments, which in the circumstances was a capital offence. By the time I reached the main guardroom at about midday the soldiers had beaten these two men almost into unconsciousness. And they were yelling at them, in bad Greek, "Who are your associates?" I don't know if the two suspects even understood the question. The average soldier is pretty useless when it comes to interrogation. I have my own methods, not particularly pleasant, but they sometimes work.

"They're brigands!" one of the soldiers shouted at me.

"All right, lock them up, and we'll do it first thing in the morning."

"Why not now?"

"I want all you men out there, on the street. Shake down anyone else who might be carrying concealed weapons. Put on a show of force."

"You're not our commanding officer," one of them said.

"If anyone gets killed out there, while you're in here, telling me who your commanding officer is, I'll see to it that you'll wish you were never born."

I tried to get some sense out of the two prisoners, but without much success. They may have been a couple of Arabs who'd been told that the city was full of thieves, and they should take their daggers with them. Well, they'd learn next morning that this was really bad advice.

I would probably have learned something useful from these two brigands, but frankly I was tired. The weather was not particularly warm, but I was getting sleepy. I usually take a nap in the early afternoon. It's what a man has to do if he's been up most of the night. Pilate's clerk arrived and told me he wanted to see me. So I reported to his office, going by the back passageway.

"You're looking tired, Markos."

"Your gracious concern is noted, Governor."

"No, I mean tired men can make mistakes."

"I shall take a rest during the Sabbath."

"Any crucifixions for tomorrow?"

"Two." I gave him a brief summary.

"What about this fellow Barabbas?"

"Not him again! He's harmless. He stands on a street corner and shouts, 'Romans go home.' No-one takes him seriously."

"Some zealous soldiers brought him in."

"All right. I'll do him if I can't find this Galilean Jeshua."

"How is it going, this search for Jesus?"

"My people are carrying some loose coins. Somebody must know where he is."

He showed me a piece of paper with some Greek writing on it, and he read it out to me, even though I could have read it reasonably well myself. It was about some technical details concerning processions and rituals. He wanted me to go to a priest's house. "You won't get access to the Chief Priest today," he said. "Have you ever met this deputy of his, Eleazar?"

"Several times." I don't know what Pilate thought I spent my days doing while he was enjoying the ocean breezes in Caesarea.

"This Eleazar doesn't like being called by the Greek version of his name."

"Lazarus. I know."

"So you know about the back gate to his house in that alley."

"Yes, Governor."

"We had a meeting set up for about the eleventh hour. I want you to discuss this paper with him. I was going to send someone else, but he's sick."

"There will be far too many people around for me to make a discreet visit."

"Send in a bunch of soldiers, to track down some pickpockets. That should clear some space for you."

"All right. I have my disguises. But why do these arrangements need to be discussed all over again?"

"Markos, you know every rat hole in this city, and every mouse hole in the surrounding countryside. I want everything to go smoothly. Smoothly, as smooth as a virgin's thigh, Markos."

"Consider it done. Is there anything else?"

"Well, here's a suggestion. Ask our mutual friend Lazarus to send out a squad, and bring in this Jeshua. Tonight. They can deliver him to our guardhouse."

"What makes you think they can find him if we can't?"

"Oh, I think they might be able to. These slippery priests pretend ignorance when it suits them. Of course I'm not casting aspersions on your skills and organisation, Markos. It's all part of what is called the balance of favours. It's my theory." I could see that he wanted to tell me something clever, so I pretended to be interested in this theory. "A person in your position, Markos, likes to have everyone owing him favours."

"Which they do."

"But a person in my position likes to have everyone thinking that I owe them a favour. It gives them a good feeling."

"Are you going to repay all these favours, some day?"

"Ha-ha-ha. Very amusing. Of course not. One day I shall return to Rome, with my money bags well filled. And then they can all enjoy the feeling of resentment. Do you understand the theory now?"

"You're very astute, Governor." He used to enjoy hearing people tell him this, and of course it was perfectly true. I record the gist of this conversation to show that Pilate and I had a good working relationship. It might also be interesting to note that Jeshua probably got crucified only because this other man who was supposed to meet with the priest Eleazar got sick, and I had to go in his place. Otherwise Jeshua might have been able to sneak back to Galilee. Who knows? - He might have still been alive today. But I can tell you he isn't. All the stories about how he was seen walking around alive and well after we had finished with him are complete nonsense.

The news had got around the city that there would be crucifixions the next day, and that quietened things down a bit. So I took Pilate's advice and had a couple of hours of sleep. In the late afternoon I got dressed up as a Bedouin pilgrim, and quietly made my way round to the back door of Eleazar's house. A short time before I arrived some soldiers were sent in, claiming to be there to arrest pickpockets, so that when I arrived everyone was in too much of a hurry to get clear of the place to pay any attention to me. I took one of my men with me, just in case we ran into any trouble.

Eleazar and I had a quite sensible discussion about the procession arrangements. He was naturally anxious when he saw that it was me, instead of this other man that he had expected. I could have told him that I was just a substitute, but why should I put his mind at rest? People ought to get worried when they see me coming. That's my motto, or it used to be. There was some general discussion, fairly amicable considering the circumstances, and then I said, "Jeshua of Nazareth, son of Joseph, is he one of your people?"

"What sort of question is that?"

"I am not here to discuss the philosophy of questions. If he is one of your people, you might think it worthwhile to try to save his skin."

"He's a Galilean!"

"I do know where Nazareth is. Is he one of your people, a rabbi or something like that?"

"He's not a Temple priest, if that's what you mean."

"That's not what I mean. What about the many other categories of holy man?"

"No, he's not a Levite, or a guardian of the divine Law, or an interpreter of the divine Law, or a designated advocate of the divine Law."

"What about these weird groups, Pharisees and Sadducees?"

"He's not one of those, as far as I know. It would be most unlikely. Look, I've never met the man."

"But you've heard of him."

"Only yarns and rumours."

"I don't know if there are any in Galilee, but has he got anything to do with these Essene people?"

"The Temple has no contact whatever with the Essenes."

"I believe you. But if you ever do have contact with them, tell them to keep their noses out of politics, or I'll be paying them a visit."

"They're outside your jurisdiction."

"I don't have a jurisdiction. Or if I do, it's where I say it is. So that's all you know about Jeshua."

"Pretty much, yes."

"You've forgotten to mention someone's name."

"What name is that?"

"John the Baptist."

"Oh, all right. Jeshua had some connection with John the Baptist."

"So why didn't you say so?"

"That would be as good as condemning the man to death. I've got nothing against this Jeshua."

"That's not what I heard. He's been criticising your priesthood as corrupt and worldly, interested only in collecting exorbitant fees for dubious spiritual services, and siphoning off money from the system of charities. Not that I'm saying, my dear Eleazar, that I agree with those criticisms. I'm just saying that this Jeshua is perhaps no more your friend than he is mine."

"Look, he's one of those self-appointed rabbis. That's how they build up a popular following, by slinging mud at the Jerusalem Temple administration. Anyway, this has nothing to do with you. Jeshua's territory is in Galilee. It's Herod's problem."

"Herod's problems sometimes become my problems. This Jeshua is not in Galilee at this moment, though, is he?"

"How should I know?"

"You know these things because it is your business to know these things. He's in Jerusalem, isn't he?"

"He might be."

"No, no. That's not good enough. The more I listen to you, the more I begin to think that you're trying to shelter this man. That wouldn't do, would it!"

"All right. He's here in Jerusalem. Staying in one of the outlying villages. I don't know where."

"But you could find out where, without much difficulty, couldn't you?"

"Why should I want to do that?"

"Here is the reason why you want to do that. You're going to send out a squad of men, and they are going to locate Jeshua of Nazareth, son of Joseph, and they are going to bring him to me, and I want to have this man in my custody by sun-up."

"Hold it! Oh, no! That's completely unacceptable. That's right outside the agreed guide-lines. What's going to happen when the people find out that the Temple has been doing the Romans' dirty work for them? There will be riots. Wait till they hear about this in Rome!"

"That's why I'm giving you all the hours of darkness to get the job done. Nobody will need to know how Jeshua came to be in my custody."

"Are you stupid? Don't you know anything? People always find out about these secret operations, as you call them."

"But my dear Lazarus - may I call you that? It is you who are not thinking clearly. There must be a dozen possibilities among your numerous and complicated religious laws. Jeshua must have violated one of your many prohibitions. You can easily think up some excuse why Jesus of Nazareth is guilty of some horrible desecration, and must with great regret be handed over to the Roman authorities for punishment. Be creative."

"You're not going to get away with this. I'm going straight to Pilate. You've overstepped your authority once too often."

"You're most welcome to take the matter up with the Governor, if you want to risk wasting his precious time. But I assure you, I am merely acting on his instructions. What do I care whether this Jeshua lives or dies? He's never done anything to upset me. I already have quite enough enemies in this world, without making any more people hate me. Let me explain things to you. No, do not interrupt. Pilate wants to do Herod Antipas a favour. As you know, the two of them have not been on good terms recently. There have been some issues, such as that unfortunate incident when Herod went over Pilate's head, as the expression is, to get authorisation from the Legate in Damascus, to execute John the Baptist. Pilate said some quite discourteous things about the Tetrarch. But if I succeed in nailing this Galilean nuisance, then Herod and Pilate will be on speaking terms again, a most blessed outcome both for myself and for this holy land."

My words calmed him down quite a lot, and I could see that he was thinking carefully about my suggestions. At last he said, "What about Barabbas? Do I get the credit?"

"Certainly, my dear Eleazar. I shall make a point of it. Let me see. 'The Governor Pilate, on behalf of the Senate and people of Rome and their most eminent first citizen Caesar, has given expression to his most generous magnanimity, by commuting the capital charge against one Barabbas to a medium-severity flogging, followed by release, in response to a humanitarian plea from senior Temple priest Eleazar, and on the grounds that the said Barabbas is feeble-minded.'"

"I don't know whether I like you less when you're trying to be clever, or when you're just being plain nasty."

"Oh, please. Like me less when I am being nasty. Because believe me, Eleazar the priest, I can be very nasty indeed."

And that more or less concluded our conversation. It was getting dark, so I and my man hurried back to headquarters before the curfew started. It might be thought that I would now go off to bed, but I did not. Instead, I put on some leather body armour and a long thick cloak, and stuck a

soldier's helmet on my head, and went out with a mounted patrol. We stopped off at a few tricky places, dismounted, and had a good look round. We went past the small hill where the executions were due to take place next day. I imagined what the scene would look like: many passers-by would see that Roman justice was fair but firm. Let everyone be warned. Do not mess with us. And I thought that Barabbas had better pray to his god that the Temple guards would find Jesus of Nazareth before dawn, or he would discover that his luck had finally run out.

Some time after midnight I got a couple of hours of sleep. Then I was woken up by one of my people, who told me that the Galilean terrorist, Jeshua, was in the interrogation cell, awaiting my pleasure, as the saying is. Now before I continue, I want to clarify some points about the events of that night, because there are some very strange stories going around, and some of these stories might suggest that I was not doing my duty to the Roman state, which would be a most grievous falsehood.

First, some people have said that Jeshua appeared before a full assembly of the Sanhedrin. This can't possibly be true in the sequence of time that I have narrated. They don't convene the Sanhedrin in the middle of the night. It is possible that Jeshua was interrogated by a small group of priests, maybe three or four, but, not surprisingly, they didn't do me the courtesy of sharing with me anything that they learned from this interrogation, if it happened at all.

There is also a story about how Jeshua appealed for mercy to Herod Antipas. But this wouldn't make any sense either. Herod was sound asleep in his feather bed, in his palace across town, while people like me were doing the work of keeping his kingdom safe. I don't know how that rumour got started. Jude, the deputy commander of Herod's security service, came across, and he may have asked Jeshua some questions, but this was after I had completed my interrogation. And if so, this was as close to Herod as Jeshua every got.

There is even some ridiculous nonsense about how crowds were in the streets before dawn, chanting, "Release Jeshua", or "Release Barabbas", or something like that. Let me assure the Senatorial Investigating Commission that the curfew was strictly enforced throughout the whole Passover period, and for several days before and after. Any group of people illegally assembling during the hours of darkness would soon have felt the sharp points of cavalrymen's lances. The way in which I carried out my duties cannot be faulted, and I testify that Pilate and all the officers under his command operated a curfew and other crowd control procedures that were efficient, professional, and completely in accordance with regulations.

Now I've met a few tough guys in my time, but after I got hold of them they didn't remain tough for long. Jeshua of Nazareth did not strike me as being a tough guy, at least not for a start. I want to make something perfectly clear. It seems that some people have said things about me that are rather unkind. That I love to hear the sound of breaking bones, or that the screaming of a suspect being interviewed is music to my ears. This is not the full story by any means. I do not hurt people unnecessarily. There is already too much pain and suffering in the world. Don't expect to see me as a spectator at what are called the blood sports: gladiators, animal fights and so on. I

just don't see any point in it. Someone once said that a true Roman enjoys the theatre of cruelty. I don't know if this is true, and anyway I'm not a Roman. I was a faithful servant of the Republic, and if called upon to do so I would again be a faithful servant of Rome.

Try to imagine a doctor, doing what he can to save a soldier's life after he has been wounded in battle. The soldier's foot is starting to go black, so the doctor saws off the leg. Even if the soldier has been doped up on alcohol and the secret medicines of the apothecary, this operation is not going to feel good. The soldier might even release his soul, so that the pain can stop - but of course his life stops also. The doctor can only do his best. If a doctor is scared of causing pain, he won't save lives. Well, that's how I used to do my job. Sometimes I even say to myself: here we have peace and prosperity, pleasure and happiness, and why? Because the crazy men who want to wreck everything have been given their just deserts. Sometimes people are foolishly loyal to crazy men. They don't want to betray them, even if it would save them much pain if they did. This is understandable, but it cannot be tolerated. A prudent man, or woman, does not get into a situation where he, or she, must either betray a crazy man, or suffer much pain, or more likely both.

Some people think that in an interrogation, the light from a window or lamp should fall on the face of the prisoner, and the interrogator's face should be in shadow. But I liked the suspect to see my face, that is, if he was not going to live long enough to recognise me later. I wanted the suspect to know that I meant business, and that wasting my time would incur severe penalties.

I could tell as soon as I sat down that Jeshua of Nazareth knew that he was done for, and that the interview was a mere formality. He'd already been knocked about a fair bit but, as he stood before me, he was quite calm, in a state that I would call beyond panic. Men who have fought in several battles tell us they know what this state of mind feels like. Of course this mental state of "beyond panic" may not last for very long, and it was my job to get rid of it in a suspect as quickly as I could, so that I could get some useful answers.

A clerk sat beside one of the lamps, trying to take notes. The interview was conducted in Aramaic, because Jeshua claimed that he knew very little Greek - although I suspect he knew more than he let on. The clerk was trying to take notes in a mixture of Aramaic and Greek, so I doubt if he wrote down anything of any value. I did not see these notes on any subsequent occasion, and I assume they were thrown away soon afterwards.

It would be a wonderful thing if we could have had enough time to conduct these interviews properly, but you will appreciate that this hardly ever happened. Everything had to be done in a rush. The sun would soon come up, and I had only as much time available, as they say, for a hungry man to eat his lunch.

"Rabbi Jeshua," I began, very politely, "you're a teacher."

"A teacher and a healer."

I should have asked what he healed, because there have been some stories going around lately about miraculous healing. But it need hardly be said that I am not a philosopher concerned with the science of sacred medicine. I asked the question that it was my job to ask. "What do you teach?"

"The Law and the prophets."

"You mean the Pentateuch."

"Not just the Torah. Also the sacred hymns and the later prophets, great and small."

"You're quite a scholar then."

"I have committed to memory the most important scriptures."

"So you can't actually read Aramaic."

"I can follow it on the page if someone else is reading."

"I have some notes here, made by people who heard you speak in towns and villages in Galilee.

You realise that paid informers were following you around."

"I tried to keep clear of them."

"Something comes up several times. The godly kingdom. Tell me about that."

"You may also call it the heavenly kingdom. Heaven is ruled over by our Heavenly Father."

"By that you mean Theos, who is called Elohim and other names in your scriptures."

"That is correct. In heaven there is no injustice, no tyranny, no cruelty, no crime, no vice, no suffering, no sickness, no madness, no death. None of these things are the things of the Heavenly Father."

"And the souls of virtuous people go to this heaven when they die."

"I believe so."

"So when you speak of the godly kingdom, you mean the afterlife, that is to say, the afterlife of virtuous people."

"No, the godly kingdom is coming to the world. All the evils of this world will be swept away, and this world will then be like heaven is now."

"When is this going to happen?"

"I don't know. Soon, I believe."

"And will it happen suddenly, or gradually?"

"I used to think gradually. I used to think that I could just teach people to be better people, and then it would gradually happen."

"But that doesn't work, does it."

He seemed to see the humour of the situation. "I shall not change the world, no matter how well I teach the people. The Heavenly Father will become impatient with slow progress and will sweep away all evil, when it is His will to do so."

"Don't try to sound like a madman. Who has all the power in this room?"

"The Heavenly Father."

"Does he indeed?"

"Everything that you do is done according to the will of our Heavenly Father."

"Permit me to disagree with you. The divine Caesar, acting on behalf of the senate and people of Rome, he is my master. Perhaps you are a fool, Jeshua the bandit from Galilee. A child could tell me

more about who has the ultimate power. Only a fool would try to live in a lion's cage and expect not to be eaten by the lion. What happened to the conspirator, John the Baptist?"

This was the first question for which he did not have a ready answer. I could see that he was now realising that John the Baptist had a quick and painless death, and that he, Jeshua, would not have such a death. Perhaps he realised then that he should have stayed in Galilee where he belonged; that he should not have rashly come to that Passover, thinking that he would not get caught. The clerk, who had been writing some disjointed notes, apparently thought that this pause in the interrogation must be significant, and he wrote down, "John the Baptist was a conspirator," and showed it to me. Being able to write doesn't mean that you've got any sense.

I now thought of something. "In connection with the divine Caesar, you mentioned Messiah, a word that I have heard but do not understand. Sometimes the priests call themselves Messiah because they have been anointed. I'm told that Herod Antipas sometimes calls himself Messiah because he is a prince. Do you think that you are Messiah?"

"No."

"How do you know?"

"Because if I was Messiah, you would be the one answering questions."

"I'm glad to see that you have recovered your sense of humour. Perhaps divine Caesar is indeed the Messiah."

He didn't seem to be insulted. "No, the godly kingdom is not the Roman Republic, and the Roman Republic is not the godly kingdom."

"Only a Jew is allowed to say things like that. Are you a proper Jew?"

"Yes."

"The Temple priests sometimes refer to Galileans as mongrel Jews."

"Our Heavenly Father makes no distinction between those of pure race and all other peoples."

"So who should rule the world while we wait for the Godly Kingdom to arrive? Do you think Caesar should rule?"

"I don't see why not."

I jumped up, pretending to lose my temper, and went over and hit him and knocked him down and kicked him, several times. "Don't lie to me," I shouted at him. Then I sat down again. The clerk thought that this must be very important, but he didn't know what to write. Jeshua picked himself up from the floor, painfully, and stood up straight again in the designated position. I stared into his eyes, but if there was any hate or fear in them the light was not good enough for me to see it.

"You're lying to me," I said fiercely. "You hate Rome and Caesar."

"The Republic is no worse than the Greek empire in the time of the Macabees."

"How do you know that?"

"There are many stories of the Greek kings' cruelty."

"Now I want you to listen carefully, Jesus of Nazareth. This is a question about the godly kingdom. Are the people who follow your teachings going to wait patiently for Theos to change the world, or are they going to try to change the world themselves, while they're waiting for Theos?"

"Both of these, or so I would hope."

"You didn't understand the question. If people who follow your teachings are going to wait patiently for Theos, I don't care how long they go on doing that. But if while they're waiting they try to do something to bring about your godly kingdom, then it is inevitable that they will come into conflict with the Roman state."

"No. The godly kingdom inhabits the soul of the righteous man or woman. It does not concern itself with laws or government. Laws and government are things of this present world. They do not belong in the godly kingdom."

"I thought you said you were a proper Jew."

"I am."

"Well let me tell you this. Laws and government are a passion with the Jews, even more so than they are with the Romans."

"That may be so, but laws and governments are made by men, not by the Heavenly Father."

"So you know more than the prophets and priests and teachers of the Law and all those people."

"Laws and lawyers are part of this world as we know it. But the godly kingdom will have no use for them."

By then, some daylight was coming in through the tiny barred window. This interrogation had gone on longer than I had expected, and I was in a hurry to terminate it. "You said you were a teacher."

"Yes."

"Teachers have disciples."

"I do not have any school or priesthood. All men and women who desire the godly kingdom are my disciples."

"You're trying to tell me that none of your followers have come here to Jerusalem with you."

"Anyone who came with me is not my follower but my friend."

"Well let me explain what I am going to do. Instead of making an example of you today, we're going to carry on with this interrogation, for as long as it takes. You're going to tell me, unwillingly of course, the names of all your friends as you call them, and you're going to tell me where to find them, and I'm going to send out some soldiers to arrest them."

"I would prefer that you put me to death, rather than harm innocent people who do not threaten you."

"Next you'll be telling me that you yourself are no threat, to Herod or to Caesar."

"I have explained that I am not a threat to any of your governments. The godly kingdom is a kingdom of the soul, of the spirit. But I realise that you are going to have to execute someone. The priest who had me arrested said that you needed to do Herod a favour."

"What will happen to your friends if you have taught them to oppose the will of Caesar?"

"You will hunt them down and kill them."

"Do you think they will oppose the will of Caesar?"

"No, but I cannot guarantee that."

"What is the use of a teacher if he cannot tell me what his disciples have learned?"

" 'An effect can know its causes, but a cause cannot know all its effects' , as the Greeks say. My friends are not my slaves. They are free men and women."

"So they are free to oppose Caesar. Perhaps your foolish words now condemn your friends to the same fate as you yourself face."

"If I lied about this, would you believe me? My friends are in the hands of the Heavenly Father, and they know this."

"There's a famous motto: 'A man can change the fate of others, but he cannot change his own fate.' Do you believe that?" I noticed the foolish clerk writing down this motto, as if it was an important finding for the case.

"I do not believe that a man has a fate. We are all in the hands of the Heavenly Father."

"A contradiction, I believe. But will that thought ease your agonies on the tree of execution?"

"Yes it will."

"You realise that I make the decisions about who gets the tree, who gets the galleys, and who goes free."

"So it seems."

"But I don't carry out the execution myself."

"I know. The army does."

"I don't care what you think of me, Jeshua of Nazareth. For tomorrow I shall have thoughts, the gods willing, and you will not. I don't make excuses, but I can justify our system of harsh justice. Soldiers don't like terrorists. A terrorist weakens the Roman state, and then the Parthians attack. The soldiers will then have to fight battles, and many of them will end up lying on the desert sands, with agonising wounds, watching the vultures flying in circles above them. So they will not treat you gently."

"I shall remember your words, and I shall try to forgive them."

I sent the scribe to bring the guards, and two of them came in. "This interview is concluded," I announced. They took him away. A pretty tough guy. I went through to the main office. A clerk was sorting out papers on Pilate's desk.

"Is the Governor on duty yet?"

"He is receiving his shave."

"Then take dictation." He selected a small piece of papyrus, knowing that I am not a literary man.

"Request authorisation to execute three brigands, one from Galilee, the other two from places unknown. A fourth man, Barabbas, to be released as a token of the gracious magnanimity of the Governor, and of the Senate and people of Rome, and of the blessed Caesar, etc, etc."

I was then busy for a while. There was a meeting of senior officers to discuss security for the day, which was considered to be the most dangerous day of the Passover. Someone asked me, "Spymaster, is Governor Pilate making an example of some brigands?" "Three," I replied. Then I had to give instructions to some of my people. After that I went round to the general guardhouse. Jeshua of Nazareth was tied up on the whipping frame, and a couple of soldiers were taking turns with a heavy whip, trying to turn his flesh into mush. I couldn't tell if the man was still conscious of if they were beating an insensible body. I gestured them over.

"What are you trying to do?"

"Teach this bandit Jew a lesson," one of them said.

"The man will be dead in a few hours. What is the use of teaching the dead?" But I don't think they followed this simple logic. "Now I'll tell you what the Governor is trying to do," I went on. "He is the one who is going to do the teaching. He's going to teach these people in Jerusalem a lesson, for their benefit. This is the lesson. If you challenge the power of Caesar, you will end up on a cross. But there will be no point in crucifying a man if you two have already killed him. So take him down and get all three men ready for execution."

"There's a fourth man here, who is to be whipped and released."

"Well, don't overdo it. We want him to be a lesson to the people, not the object of outraged sympathy."

A message-boy brought me the authorisation, with Pilate's signature scribbled at the bottom. I passed it on to the officer who was to be in charge of the executions. Then I was busy with accounts. I'm not good with paper-work but I had to make a list of who was paid, and how much, and what information they had provided for the money. A man in my position needs to protect himself from any charges of misappropriation. I had been training a young chap to do the writing for me, but he was found one morning in a back alley with his throat cut. Then I had a sleep, and something to eat. After that there were more sums of money to be paid out, and I spent an hour or so chatting with officers, picking up gossip. Some officers who had been out with patrols came in and reported that things were generally quiet. The Sabbath hour was approaching, and the Jews would soon be going indoors. I mention these facts because some people have claimed that there was an eclipse of the sun on that day, but if there had been I would certainly have heard about it from someone.

There was still supposed to be a curfew in place, although quite a few "gentiles" were going about their business until quite late. I put on a soldier's leather jacket and a long cloak and cape, and went out with a couple of my men and a decurion called Lucius. I needed to visit a few people discreetly, and I wanted to check on a number of things, because even good patrols sometimes don't know what to look for. I assumed that the execution squad had already finished their job and

returned to barracks. They had orders to finish off the bandits with well placed spear-thrusts and to dismantle the crucifixion site before the Sabbath began. We took care not to desecrate the Sabbath with blood, because it might incite violent riots.

So, as I said, I expected the execution squad to have finished their duty as soon as they could. Their orders were to throw the bodies into the old quarry which was used as a rubbish tip. This is an important aspect of crucifixion. The dead bodies of political criminals need to be defamed, by feeding them to crows and wild dogs instead of allowing them a sacred burial. I was quite surprised, therefore, to come upon three soldiers from the execution squad taking the bodies to the quarry in a handcart when the sun had already set, and it was starting to get dark. As soon as we approached out of the gloom, I could see that these soldiers were nervous about something, and I thought I could hear the clink of coins.

"Disarm!" I shouted. And I, with my companions, reached for our swords. The soldiers hesitated for a moment and then threw their weapons down on the ground. "Get that money off them," I ordered the decurion, without much attention to protocol. With some difficulty he made the three soldiers hand over all the money they had, and counted the coins into a money bag.

"So, it's pay day, is it," he remarked sarcastically, "and you men get paid more than centurions."

"They've been bribed," I said. "They've been bribed to let one of the felons escape." I didn't know how they could have done this. I just knew in my heart that something like this had happened. One of my men was moving things about on the handcart, timber, tools and so forth.

"No," he said. "Both of the bodies are here on the cart."

"What do you mean, *both*?"

"I mean all of them. The two. Both."

"There's supposed to be *three* bodies, you imbecile!" This was not a fair thing to say, since the man did not know how many executions had been carried out.

"The senior of the three soldiers was terrified. "Please, Commander," he said to me. "We took bribes, but only to allow a burial. The man was dead, I swear by all the gods."

"Show me."

"What?"

"Show me the tomb. Show me the body!"

"I can't. It's dark. The Jewish cemetery, it's over there."

"Then we shall go there *now*, and find this body!" I didn't know how we were going to be able to do this. Perhaps I was not thinking clearly. Somehow we got everything moving, the three soldiers hauling the handcart and the four of us following them, burdened down with the extra weapons. When we came to a main road we were challenged by a foot patrol of six men, who had two lanterns which they had not yet lit. Their officer reluctantly allowed me to take charge, and as we made our way towards the burial-place, I tried to explain the situation to him.

The patrol, being superstitious Bithynian men, were reluctant to enter the place of burial at night. "The dead cannot hurt you," I said to them scornfully. Someone blew on the slow-taper and

we got the lanterns lit, and tried to find our way through the tombs. At last the dog that the patrol had with them led us to a crypt which had signs of recent usage. Inside the soldiers found what looked like a recently-dead body wrapped in a shroud, and they dragged it outside.

"Bring that lamp over here," I shouted, trying to unwind the burial cloth. It was with some relief that I recognised the battered face of Jeshua of Nazareth, cold and dead. "Take the body to the cart," I ordered, hauling off the shroud.

"This cloth could be worth something," said one of the patrolmen, "if soaked at the laundry."

"Roll up the cloth, and put it back in the tomb," I ordered. "We are entitled to take the body, because it's not supposed to be here. But if we are accused of stealing a shroud, then people will say we have desecrated a grave." Half the army is made up of men who need to have everything explained to them.

It was a miserable trudge to the quarry, thirteen living men and three dead ones. We stumbled over obstacles and cursed. Twice a lantern was dropped and had to be relit from the other one. At last we reached the place where rubbish was thrown into the hole, and the three naked corpses were flung over the side. Then the patrol officer agreed to escort the three delinquent soldiers back to the guardhouse. They were dealt with by their commanding officer and a discipline committee the next morning.

Lucius the decurion remarked to me, "If you want anything done properly, you have to do it yourself."

I think that this concludes all the testimony that is of interest to the Investigating Commission. But I didn't go to all the trouble of getting this account written down simply to tell you that the man was dead. You can take my word for that, but I want to make certain things clear.

It is quite correct that I did not attempt to round up the followers of Jeshua of Nazareth. The fact is, they simply didn't cause any trouble. Whoever they were, in the days after the execution of their leader, they all seemed to have gone back to Galilee, and I heard no more of them for some time. When some of them showed up in Jerusalem later on and claimed that Jeshua was the anointed Messiah, this did not seem to constitute a threat to Rome. Rather it turned into a quarrel between them and other sects of the Jews, a purely religious matter that was none of my concern. No-one could have foreseen that later there would be stories going around that Jeshua had come back to life in the tomb, because the body had 'disappeared'. Such things as people coming back to life simply do not happen. There was nothing magic or supernatural about what is called the disappearance of the body. The bones of Jeshua, gnawed by wild dogs and scattered, are buried under a mountain of rubbish in a quarry in Jerusalem. We hear about fierce arguments in Jerusalem over whether Jeshua was a prophet or not, but this is an internal Jewish religious controversy. While they are fighting each other they will presumably be less of a threat to Rome.

I don't know anything about this other man, Paul of Tarsus, except that he's been travelling around in Asia and Greece, trying to convert the Jews who live in the cities to the cult of Jesus

the Christos, which means 'messiah'. There have been disputes over control of Jewish meeting-places, which the authorities have had to sort out.

I wish to stress that there was always a good working relationship between myself and Governor Pilate. We respected each other's ability. He did his job, and I did mine. I won't comment on his successor, except to make some general observations.

A career such as mine does not usually end well. There is no retirement plan, with a comfortable life and an honourable reputation. If a liaison officer wishes to return to obscurity he is always told, "No, we still need your knowledge. You can't leave yet." At the same time they undermine this officer's authority and waste his time with trivial distractions. Soon you realise that something nasty is going to happen. A new governor will try to make himself popular by condemning the hated security liaison officer. There will be trumped-up charges, an arrest, torture, and then execution. I had no desire to end up in the same place where I had put many bandits and terrorists: on a cross.

And so, while the successor of Pilate wasted my time, I made several journeys out of the province, to places where I could hide my money. I don't trust people to look after my money for me, because loyalty to a strong man dies away soon after it becomes known that he has lost power.

And then, with warning signs appearing everywhere, I called on all the people who owed me favours, and 'borrowed' money from them. Soon word would get around that I was behaving strangely, so I trimmed my beard as short as I could, and I did what they say the body of Jeshua did. I disappeared.

I am not a Roman, but I have served Rome more faithfully than almost any man from Italy. My advice to the Senate and to the glorious citizen Caesar is that future governors of Judea will need to be as capable, and as ruthless, as Governor Pilate, and future security liaison officers will need to be as thorough as I was. If the situation in Jerusalem is not kept under tight control, there will be riots, revolts, wars, and much killing and destruction.