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## Comments on John C. Robison's "Crucifixion in the Roman World"

Jeffrey R. Chadwick

Congratulations on the most recent (Winter 2002) of *Studia Antiqua*. It looks in every respect to be a fine and high quality publication. Thank you for the complimentary copy, and for the opportunity to serve on the second issue's faculty review board. I have read the volume with interest, and wish, in addition to extending congratulations, to comment on one of the fine articles.

"Crucifixion in the Roman World: The Use of Nails at the Time of Christ" by John C. Robison (Vice President of the Student Society for Ancient Studies) is a thorough and well researched article, which I very much enjoyed reading. In fact, I read it twice, the second time pausing to make careful notes. This was because of a notable error (or perhaps it may be called an omission) in the article. I wish to point out this error, hoping that (1) the record may be corrected concerning the subject matter, and (2) perhaps this information might be passed on by you to the author, so he may adjust his otherwise excellent work before it is printed again.

The introduction to the article (the italicized abstract which appears above the actual first paragraph) states that "... in the well known case of Jesus, we are never told how he was fastened to the cross." This assumption runs throughout the article, and explicitly appears in a number of places, for example the footnote on p. 27 which alleges that "... the sources do not explicitly state that Jesus' hands and feet were nailed. . . ." This is, of course incorrect.

It is true that the four New Testament gospels do not mention nails in the passages which report the actual act of Jesus being crucified (Matt. 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:33, and John 19:18). However, it is absolutely clear from the text of John 20 (and it is also strongly implied in Luke 24) that Jesus was fastened to his cross with nails. John 20:25 explicitly mentions nails, in the context of the story of the apostle Thomas:

“The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails . . . I will not believe” (John 18:25).

Two verses later, we are told that the Risen Christ gave Thomas the opportunity to examine the physical evidence in the manner he desired:

“Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands . . .” (John 18:27).

The event where the other ten apostles had been granted this same examination is recorded in Luke:

“And when he had thus spoken he shewed them his hands and his feet” (Luke 24:40).

While Luke, like the second passage of John, does not specifically say “nails,” it is an obvious allusion to the motif mentioned in the first passage from John, which does specifically mention nails. How, then, can it be maintained that “we are never told how he was fastened to the cross,” or that “the sources do not explicitly state the Jesus hands and feet were nailed?” (Surely the texts of John and Luke are not suggesting that the apostles were examin-

ing rope burns—particularly since Thomas had mentioned nails!)

It appears that Robison, in putting together an otherwise fine article, simply missed an important New Testament passage—one that could have easily been located by looking up “nail” in any decent Bible concordance or index. This points out to me once again the importance of “searching the scriptures” prior to searching all the rest of the sources we so often rely upon as scholars of the ancient world.

Another *ancient* source Robison might have quoted, particularly since the journal is essentially a Latter-day Saint product, is the Book of Mormon, where the Risen Christ says:

“Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet . . .” (3 Nephi 11:14).

The Nephites are said to have complied with Jesus directive, and the nail prints are duly noted:

“And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet . . .” (3 Nephi 11:15).

Now it might be felt that if the audience for the paper were interfaith or ecumenical, the Book of Mormon would not be looked upon as a legitimate ancient source, and might therefore not be quoted (although I think this is a timid position). But certainly in an LDS setting, the Book of Mormon ought to be considered one of the “ancient sources.”

In defense of Robison, may I relate an anecdote which demonstrates that he is not alone in having missed the New Testament references. Two of the fine scholars that he frequently cites as proponents of the “crucifixion by tying with ropes” model, James Charlesworth and Joseph Zias, also somehow missed those

passages. In August of 2000, I was invited by Charlesworth (a delightful guy who insists I call him “Jim”) to present at the scholarly conference on “Jesus and Archaeology” in Jerusalem which he had organized, and which took place at the Notre Dame de France Hospice. My topic was on “Jesus and the Archaeology of the Golan,” but the topic presented by Zias (an equally nice guy who insists one call him “Joe”) was on the methodology of crucifixion, specifically in terms of whether or not Jesus was nailed or tied to the cross. Zias’ thesis, of course, was that in the absence of specific textual evidence to the contrary, Jesus was likely crucified by being fastened to the cross with ropes rather than nails. After explaining at length how such a method could cause a most uncomfortable death, he concluded by opening the floor for questions or comments.

I was somewhat taken aback that in ten minutes of queries and comments by some of the worlds finest biblical (i.e., New Testament) and archaeological scholars, no one defended the idea that Jesus was nailed to the cross. Although several were clearly uncomfortable with Zias’ conclusion, no one rose to quote the New Testament evidence—no one seemed to remember it. At length I raised my hand, was recognized by Charlesworth (who moderated the question and comment sections), and stood up to speak. Opening my Bible, I said I’d like to ask how we ought to respond to the words of Thomas in John 20:25, and then read aloud the scripture:

“Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails . . . I will not believe.”

The room was absolutely silent for about fifteen seconds. A hundred people just sat there, the atmosphere electric. I think they were feeling the power of the scriptural word as it rested upon us all. It was one of the most remarkable experiences I’ve ever had. Joe Zias was speechless. Finally, he ended the long pause of silence

by simply saying “I don’t have an answer for that passage, other than we obviously missed something very significant.” Jim Charlesworth then chimed in, with his characteristic big smile, and said: “Wouldn’t you know that it’s our Mormon friend who points out to us what we overlooked in the Bible.”

The remarks and slaps on the back I received from Catholics and Protestants alike after the session, and the genuine friendliness which both Joe and Jim showed me at the luncheon afterward, all demonstrated that the appeal to the scriptures had fallen on receptive minds and hearts. I hope the small critique I have raised in relation to John Robison’s fine article will find the same response.

All the best,

Jeffrey R. Chadwick  
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