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The Fraudulent Archko Volume

Richard Lloyd Anderson*

Would you like the views of Mary and Joseph about Jesus? An interview with the shepherds on the miracles at his birth? Reports of his last hours from Pilate, Herod Antipas, and Caiaphas? All these and more are promised to those who take the *Archko Volume* seriously. No scholar does; witness its quick dismissal by the apocrypha expert, M. R. James, who called it a "ridiculous and disgusting American book."¹ Credit belongs to an American authority, Edgar J. Goodspeed, for summarizing why such a verdict is required.² Yet some Bible believers accept the Archko documents so that the book is often stocked in religious bookstores and periodically quoted to church audiences as containing "factual accounts" of those who came in contact with the Lord.³ Yet perversions of fact contaminate virtually every page of this book, so that anyone with basic knowledge of ancient history can multiply Goodspeed's random samples of blunders that it contains. More significantly, the basic fallacy of each "ancient" discovery needs explanation, together with evidence beyond the survey level on how the *Archko Volume* was fabricated.

REVEREND WILLIAM D. MAHAN

Many spurious documents are of ancient origin, but the Archko collection is a modern forgery, produced by the Rever-

*Dr. Anderson is professor of history and religion at Brigham Young University.

¹Montague R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 90. At the outset I wish to thank my secretaries for indispensable help in this article: daughter Roselle Anderson for research and writing inquiries, and Lorelei Olsen for research and typing the final draft.

²Edgar J. Goodspeed gave more insight in his second treatment, beginning with *Strange New Gospels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1931]), chapter 5, following with a rewritten chapter in *Modern Apocrypha* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), reissued as *Famous Biblical Hoaxes* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House [c1956]), chapter 4.

³The phrase is from Arland Udell, *The Boyhood of Jesus* (Salt Lake City: [n.p.], 1956), preface of this pamphlet publicizing the *Archko Volume*.

end William Dennes Mahan. Born in a pioneer generation (27 July 1824), he spent his mature years in upper central Missouri, residing in Boonville for about the last thirty years of his life.⁴ He appears first in vital records at Gallatin, Missouri, where he was a "Minister Pres." in 1860.⁵ Cumberland Presbyterian records locate his pastoral service in eastern Missouri (Louisiana) in 1865, then back in central Missouri at Arrow Rock in 1868-71, where he also appears on the 1870 census as a minister. He retained his status in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church until 1885 (by their records, living in Boonville from 1872-85), but he may have been inactive in that profession, judging by his 1880 census status in Boonville as a "hotel keeper." He died at the "Mahan House" in Boonville on 19 October 1906, leaving a wife and one child.⁶

The lack of clarity and education displayed in Mahan's writing throws doubt on his professional fitness, raising possible financial motives in the publishing of his invented writings. Perhaps there is a pang of conscience in his preface, offering the book with the assurance that "it can do no harm to anyone or to any church."⁷ But when challenged, he bluntly rationalized:

[I]t is paying us about 20 dollars per day, and its prospects and popularity is increasing every day. You are bound to admit that the items in the book can't do any harm, even if it were false, but will cause many to read and reflect that otherwise would not. So the balance of good is in its favor.⁸

⁴Birth date is found in Mahan's obituary, *Boonville Weekly Advertiser*, 26 October 1906, which is inaccurate in stating that he lived in Boonville from 1845.

⁵The Minutes of the General Assembly, Cumberland Presbyterian Church, are the best source for Mahan's location while a minister, confirming the 1860 census. Census records also list real estate, so he undoubtedly farmed in his earlier years, and there are no ministerial listings from 1861-64, 1866-67, and 1869.

⁶*Boonville Weekly Advertiser*, 26 October 1906. For locating and reproducing articles pertaining to Mahan I am particularly indebted to Mrs. Alma Vaghan, Newspaper Librarian, State Historical Society of Missouri, and her former assistant, Mrs. Mary Katheryn Stroh.

⁷All quotations are made from the currently available *Archko Volume*, issued in Grand Rapids, Michigan by the Archko Press in numerous printings from 1951 to the present, based on Mahan's 1896 edition. The quotation cited appears on page 41, but was evidently first published by the author in rebuttal in the *Boonville Weekly Advertiser*, 20 February 1885, supplement.

⁸W. D. Mahan to Rev. J. A. Quarles, Boonville, Mo., 13 November 1884, cited in the *Boonville Weekly Advertiser*, 20 February 1885, with "false" spelled "faulce."

As events turned out, raising such questions was more significant than the answering of them:

Might not these writings have been manufactured to make money out of? If so, it was a poor business, for this is the first and only book ever produced from them. It certainly was a bad speculation on their part.⁹

PILATE'S COURT, 1878

Mahan's ancient writings moved through three main stages. In the beginning there was *A Correct Transcript of Pilate's Court* copyrighted in 1878, its title page claiming it to be "a correct account" of Jesus' trial and death "from Tiberius Caesar's records in the Vatican at Rome." This claim was buttressed by authenticating letters which are still printed with the expanded collection. A German named H. C. Whydaman was supposedly snowbound with Mahan in Missouri, and told of seeing the original report of Pilate to Tiberius in the Vatican library.¹⁰ On request, Whydaman wrote to "the chief guardian of the Vatican," one Father Freelinhusen, who agreed to furnish a Latin transcript for "thirty-five darics" (a coin unknown in modern Italy but used in ancient Persia). Whydaman obtained the transcript and forwarded it "to my brother-in-law, C. C. Vantberger" in New York City, who translated the document into English for Reverend Mahan, who then published it. None of the characters in this drama can be verified, and the "true copy, word for word" (as certified by the Vatican's Freelinhusen) grew considerably in the next edition. This is not surprising, since Goodspeed found that it was based on a Boston pamphlet of 1842, *Pontius Pilate's Account of the Condemnation of Jesus Christ*, purporting to come from "an old Latin manuscript recently found at Vienne."¹¹

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WRITINGS OF THE SANHEDRIN, 1884

Stage two of Mahan's production was the most creative. Lew Wallace's novel *Ben-Hur* appeared in 1880, the year after

⁹Mahan, *Archko Volume*, p. 36.

¹⁰In the second century Justin Martyr referred to the "Acts of Pilate," trial records of Christ (Apology 1.35, 48), and shortly afterward Tertullian referred to a report of Pilate to Tiberius (Apology 5.21). From these points of departure several Christian "Acts of Pilate" were produced in early centuries, but Mahan's "Acts of Pilate" had no specific relationship to any of them.

¹¹Goodspeed, *Hoaxes*, p. 42. Responsible 1881 investigation proved "Freelinhusen" neither custodian nor known at the Vatican. *Boonville Weekly Topic*, 20 February 1885.

Pilate's Court was first published. Soon *Pilate's Court* appeared with ten more ancient documents, growing from a pamphlet of 32 pages to a book ten times that size. This 1884 edition was "published for the author" in St. Louis by the printer of the earlier pamphlet. The main portion of the new title was *Archaeological Writings of the Sanhedrin and Talmuds of the Jews* and was given double billing in subtitles as "the record made by the enemies of Jesus of Nazareth in his day" and "the most interesting history ever read by man." This edition is critical in assessing Mahan, for it contains his clearest plagiarism and proves false his claim of translating ancient records. The most telling section was "Eli's Story of the Magi," which was prefaced as follows:

While investigating the Sanhedrin and the Talmuds in Constantinople, October 22nd, 1883, I came upon the following parchment, written and bound between two cedar boards. It was signed Ben. Eli. Who he was, or where he came from, or when he wrote, we cannot tell, nor can we say it is true; yet it is so compatible with our history, and has so many strange things connected with it that we thought it would be interesting to our readers.¹²

So European discoveries furnished Mahan's new format. While retaining the mail-order version of *Pilate's* report, he expanded his plot with himself center stage. He talked of a ten-year investigation, "corresponding with many historians and scholars, sending for all the books that could instruct me on these great questions."¹³ Next he said he personally went to "the Vatican at Rome, and then to the Jewish Talmuds at Constantinople,"¹⁴ in the process "engaging two expert scholars, Drs. McIntosh, of Scotland, and Twyman, of England."¹⁵ Otherwise unknown, their credentials are independently attested by one Dr. Rubin, who met Mahan, McIntosh, and Twyman in the Vatican "with a number of clerks, both readers and scribes"; Rubin (also unknown) opined, "they seem to be men of great age and learning."¹⁶ There are few clues to the re-

¹²Mahan, *Archaeological Writings of the Sanhedrin and Talmuds of the Jews* (St. Louis: Perrin and Smith, 1884), p. 113.

¹³Mahan, *Archko Volume*, p. 36.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 36. Instead of citing their British Isle posts after 1884, Mahan's title page conferred the strange honor on these two of belonging to "the Antiquarian Lodge, Genoa, Italy."

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 42. This letter supposedly appeared in the *Brunswick*, but J. A. Quarles found that it did not. *Boonville Weekly Advertiser*, 27 March 1885, and *Weekly Topic*, same date, referring to the editor's letter of 16 January 1885.

nowned scholars who accompanied Mahan; one, a letter to his wife from the indefinite "Market Place" of Rome, reports the rendezvous with Dr. McIntosh "at St. Elgin" (supposedly in Paris, but unknown): "He is one of the nicest old men and one of the finest scholars I ever met."¹⁷ There is even a letter from McIntosh himself, who speaks like neither Scot nor scholar, but rather uses Mahan's own phraseology. For instance, Mahan's 1884 subtitle recurs in his explanations. Mahan claims that the compilation "will be found one of the most strange and interesting books ever read."¹⁸ Interestingly, McIntosh has similar wording for the same opinion: "The Doctor thinks it will be one of the most important books ever brought before the public, except the Bible."¹⁹ And the learned McIntosh (in an open letter to North America), confirms that Mahan would "bring out one of the best books ever offered to the Christian world except the Bible."²⁰ Even Dr. Rubin has the same idiom: "It will prove to be one of the most interesting books ever presented to the Christian world."²¹

Challenged repeatedly during the two decades prior to his death, Mahan never proved the existence of these learned companions—nor of the trip itself.²² He supposedly sailed from New York on 21 September 1883 and returned about December of the same year.²³ But this account is inconsistent, since Mahan claimed to land in Marseilles "after twelve days out

¹⁷Mahan, *Archko Volume*, p. 45.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 47.

²⁰Ibid., p. 43.

²¹Ibid., p. 42.

²²Mahan's chief antagonist burst the McIntosh-Twyman bubble through correspondence. First, he elicited the following letter from Mahan (7 November 1884): "No man in this country could translate the ancient hebrew. I was informed of the fact at Leipsig, and it was here I procured the assistance of Dr. Mcintosh. Dr. Twyman is his assistent. Dr. Mcintosh is only an expert in learning [,] has been imployed by the Leipsig university in this work, he is a Methodist a good Scotchman and a Schollar. Twyman is an inglishmen [,] he is a Materialest and is in the employ of the other." On receiving this letter, J. A. Quarles wrote for verification to university authorities at Leipsig (1 January 1885); they answered (28 January 1885) that neither McIntosh nor Twyman "have been known at this University during the past five years." The full correspondence was published in the *Boonville Weekly Advertiser*, 27 March 1885 and also the *Weekly Topic*, same date. Two points are noteworthy in this Mahan letter: (1) If reproduced accurately, it shows an illiteracy harmonious with the poor representation of names and events in his writings; (2) It suggests a personal trip to Leipsig that cannot fit the dates given by Mahan.

²³Mahan, *Archko Volume*, pp. 13, 47-48. Mahan mentioned "a gale" upon leaving, which is authentic, according to an article of that date in the *New York Times*, indicating the difficulty of a rescue. Possibly Mahan had such information before writing that detail.

from New York"; yet his chapter on Antipas' defense is dated the fifth day from his sailing.²⁴ A greater problem was considerable local skepticism that Mahan ever was abroad. One hometown newspaper openly requested verification:

It is a very easy matter to prove it, *if he made the trip*. This is the first and most important step that he should take. Gather a list of the passengers and give us the name of the vessel he left this country on, and the date he sailed. A list is always published and is accessible at any time. Give us the date of his arrival in Europe. Produce his passport. Produce his letters written from the old country . . . THE ADVERTISER published a letter purported to have been written from Rome to his wife while he was absent from Boonville. Let the public see that envelope and its postmarks. There are hundreds of ways by which he can prove he made this trip, and until this is done, the public have a right to consider themselves *imposed upon* and the author *an imposter*.²⁵

No doubt Mahan's strongest answer appeared in subsequent editions—three letters from acquaintances, written in January 1887. They said only two things on the question of his absence: that he left Boonville in the fall of 1883 with the declared intention of going to Europe; and that the Roman letter to his wife was seen while he was gone—the most specific testimonial adding, "I did not see the postmarks on the letter, but understood it was from Rome."²⁶

But there were unshakable grounds on which to test Mahan's story, for (as already noted), he claimed to find at Constantinople the "parchment, written and . . . signed Ben. Eli."²⁷ This document alone took up 87 of the 352 pages in Mahan's 1884 edition, and most of "Ben. Eli" freely used *Ben-Hur* as its source. Sample comparisons of the 1880 novel and Mahan's use of it reveal his methods. Ben. Eli's document opens with the same situation as *Ben-Hur*, three Magi journeying to Jerusalem from Greece, India, and Egypt. Mahan's account has them speaking before the Sanhedrin, whereas

²⁴The Marseilles arrival appears in his Roman letter (*Archko Volume*, p. 44). On first publishing "Herod Antipas' Defense" in 1884 the preface read: "City of Rome, September 26th, 1883," a date deleted from later editions. *Archaeological Writings*, p. 240.

²⁵*Boonville Weekly Advertiser*, 20 February 1885. The *Weekly Topic* published a similarly blunt appeal on the same date.

²⁶Mahan, *Archko Volume*, p. 49.

²⁷Mahan, *Archaeological Writings*, p. 113. The entire quotation on finding the bound parchment in Constantinople is quoted above.

Wallace set their rendezvous in a desert tent, where they first shared philosophy and experiences. In both accounts the Greek speaks first:²⁸

Wallace

Then, slowly at first, like one watchful of himself, the Greek began:

"What I have to tell, my brethren, is so strange that I hardly know where to begin or what I may with propriety speak. I do not yet understand myself. The most I am sure of is that I am doing a Master's will, and that the service is a constant ecstasy. When I think of the purpose I am sent to fulfill, there is in me a joy so inexpressible that I know the will is God's."

The good man paused, unable to proceed, while the others, in sympathy with his feelings, dropped their gaze.

"Far to the west of this," he began again, "there is a land which may never be forgotten; if only because the world is too much its debtor, and because the indebtedness is for things that bring to men their purest pleasures. I will say nothing of the arts, nothing of philosophy, of eloquence, of poetry, of war: O my brethren, here is the glory which must shine forever in perfected letters, by which He we go to find and proclaim will be made known to all the earth. The land I speak of is Greece. I am Gaspar, son of Cleanthes the Athenian.

"My people," he continued, "were given wholly to study, and

Mahan

The Greek slowly, and like one watchful of himself, began:

"What I have to tell, my brethren, is so strange that I hardly know where to begin, or what I may with propriety speak. I do not yet understand myself. The most I am sure of is, that I am doing a master's will, and that the service is a constant ecstasy. When I think of the purpose I am sent to fulfill, there is in me a joy so inexpressible that I know the will is God's."

Here the good man paused unable to proceed.

"Far to the west of this," he began again, "there is a land which may never be forgotten, if only because the world is too much its debtor, and because the indebtedness is for things that bring to man their purest pleasure. I will say nothing of the arts, nothing of the philosophy, of eloquence, of poetry, of war. Oh, my brethren, here is the glory which must shine forever, in perfected letters by which he whom we go to find will be made known to all the earth. The land I speak of is Greece.

"My people," he continued, "were given wholly to study.

²⁸The left column quotes Lew Wallace, *Ben-Hur, A Tale of the Christ* (New York: Harper, 1880), pp. 14-15, without change. The right column quotes Mahan, *Archaeological Writings*, pp. 114-15, with changes only in indentation and spacing for comparison.

from them I derived the same passion. It happens that two of our philosophers, the very greatest of the many, teach, one the doctrine of a Soul in every man, and its Immortality; the other the doctrine of One God, infinitely just. From the multitude of subjects about which the schools were disputing, I separated them, as alone worth the labor of solution; for I thought there was a relation between God and the soul as yet unknown. On this theme the mind can reason to a point, a dead, impassable wall; arrived there, all that remains is to stand and cry aloud for help. So I did; but no voice came to me over the wall. In despair, I tore myself from the cities and the schools."

At these words a grave smile of approval lighted the gaunt face of the Hindoo.

Above is only one sample of the identical language of the Wallace-Mahan wise men. The fictitious Ben. Eli continues to use Gaspar's words from *Ben-Hur*, followed by similar long extracts from the Indian's and the Egyptian's speeches. Finally Mahan breaks the sequence with his own classic line: "At this point he was interrupted by the Sanhedrin asking for something more to the point."²⁹ In Wallace's novel the king hears of the Magi's coming, and convokes a private advisory council presided over by Hillel. But Mahan has one of the Magi relate his own attendance at this council, describing Hillel just as Wallace had conceived him:³⁰

Wallace

He had been cast in large mould, but was now shrunken and stooped to ghastliness; his white robe dropped from his shoulders in folds that gave no hint of muscle or anything but an angular

Two of our philosophers, the very greatest of the many, teach, one the doctrine of soul in every man and its immortality; the other, the doctrine of one God, infinitely just. From the multitude of subjects, about which the schools were disputing, I separated them as alone worth the labor of solution, for I thought there was a relation between God and the soul as yet unknown. On this, the mind can reason to a point—a dead, impassable wall. Arrived there, all that remains is to stand and cry aloud for help. So I did; but no voice came to me over the wall. In despair I tore myself from the cities and the schools."

At this a smile of delight stole over the crowd.

Mahan

He had been cast in a large mould, but was now shrunken and stooped to ghastliness. His white robe dropped from his shoulders in folds that gave no signs of muscular power.

²⁹Ibid., p. 130.

³⁰The left column quotes Wallace, *Ben-Hur*, pp. 66-67, and the right column quotes Mahan, *Archaeological Writings*, p. 135, exactly as outlined in footnote 28.

skeleton. His hands, half concealed by sleeves of silk, white and crimson striped, were clasped upon his knees. When he spoke, sometimes the first finger of the right hand extended tremulously; he seemed incapable of other gesture. But his head was a splendid dome.

A few hairs, whiter than fine-drawn silver, fringed the base; over a broad, full-sphered skull the skin was drawn close, and shone in the light with positive brilliance; the temples were deep hollows, from which the forehead beetled like a wrinkled crag; the eyes were wan and dim; the nose was pinched; and all the lower face was muffled in a beard flowing and venerable as Aaron's. Such was Hillel the Babylonian! The line of prophets, long extinct in Israel, was now succeeded by a line of scholars, of whom he was first in learning—a prophet in all but the divine inspiration! At the age of one hundred and six, he was still Rector of the Great College.

The latter example shows a more selective copying, and gives an insight into the looser adaptations of the *Archaeological Writings*. These generally contain subtle plagiarism, but the slavish copying throughout the "parchment . . . signed Ben. Eli" drew immediate fire. Chief spokesman of the exposure was a former Boonville Presbyterian minister, the Reverend James Addison Quarles. Quarles had a good education for his day, including two years at Princeton Theological Seminary, had been an active pastor in several locations, and in the Mahan controversy wrote from Lexington, Missouri, where he was president of the Elizabeth Aull Seminary. He later accepted a philosophy professorship at Washington and Lee University, where he was greatly respected for his academic and personal excellence.³¹ Quarles took Mahan to task in the

His hands, half concealed by sleeves of white silk with bands, were folded on his knees. When he spoke he sometimes raised his finger, which indicated more of caution than direction.

His hair, as white as fine-drawn silver, lay sprinkled over his towering forehead.

All his lower face was covered with a flowing beard as graceful as was Aaron's.

This great and venerable man at 106 years was still rector of the great college.

³¹Sample biographies of Quarles are found in the *History of Lafayette*

Boonville press for anachronisms, lack of verification of his story, and open borrowing, declaring the supposed manuscripts "spurious."³² Because Mahan's answers were vague and unconvincing, a hearing was convened to consider his ministerial standing.

Documentation of Mahan's trial exists in two known forms: the official New Lebanon Presbytery minutes, and the more detailed newspaper report of charges and proceedings. The minutes show the proceedings to have been charitably handled, though they indicate that a judiciary committee was appointed because of public controversy over W. D. Mahan's book, "*Archaeological Writings of the Jewish Sanhedrin and Talmuds*, recently published by him."³³ The Presbytery went on record as taking action because:

[T]his controversy is of such a nature as to seriously reflect upon the character of Bro. Mahan as a Christian minister and member of this Pres., and has acquired such publicity that we regard it as due to the cause of Christianity, to this Pres., and to Bro. Mahan, that the matter be investigated by this body.³⁴

The designated hearing began on the evening of 28 September 1885 and continued the following day. The following decision was reached by the Presbytery:

The Pres. of New Lebanon, having heard the charges against Rev. W. D. Mahan presented by common fame, having carefully examined the testimony introduced by both parties, and having patiently considered the arguments and explanations which have been offered, as well by the accused as by the prosecution, decide that the charge against the said Rev. W. D. Mahan has been fully proved; and further, the Pres., having carefully considered the whole

County, Mo. (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Company, 1881), pp. 254-58 and *Who's Who in America* (Chicago: A. N. Marquis, 1906-7), p. 1452. For important biographical details on Quarles (and Mahan) I am indebted to Reference Librarian Golden R. Howard of the State Historical Society of Missouri and to Assistant Reference Librarian Betty R. Kondayan of the Cyrus Hall McCormick Library, Washington and Lee University.

³²Mrs. Kondayan, Assistant Reference Librarian at Washington and Lee University has given invaluable help in making Quarles' private notes on Mahan available for this article.

³³The issue was framed in terms of authenticity "respecting the character of the contents of the book." Records of the New Lebanon Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 4(October 1880 to March 1887): 125. Director Thomas H. Campbell, Historical Library and Archives of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, has courteously furnished photocopies of these minutes.

³⁴*Ibid.*

case, does unanimously judge and determine that the said Rev. W. D. Mahan ought to be and is hereby suspended from the exercise of the functions, all and singular, of his office as a minister of the Gospel for a period of twelve months.³⁵

Grounds for the decision are undoubtedly accurately given by the *Boonville Advertiser*, since it had responsibly reported both sides of the Mahan-Quarles controversy over many months.³⁶ Charges came on four counts. First, Mahan was accused of not travelling to Constantinople, though he produced letters from "various persons in England, France and Italy referring to his visit to those countries"; a slight majority acquitted him of this, but convicted him on all remaining counts. The second charge was that he added material in 1884 to his first publication of *Pilate's Court*.

On the second count Mr. Mahan admitted making "corrections" and "revisions" in the first edition of his book, but claimed there was nothing in the alterations to disprove the genuineness of the first edition. The Presbytery, however, thought differently, and by a vote, of eleven to six, convicted the defendant.

Mahan's third indictment concerned "publishing as his own production" the writings of another minister on baptism. He defended himself by "admitting that he had copied his *History of Baptism* . . . never supposing the letters would be printed in book form," and he was unanimously judged guilty on the charge. The final accusation was "publishing as a story of his, found in Constantinople, October 22, 1883, 'Eli's Story of the Magi.'" In reaching decisive conviction on this count, *Ben-Hur* was considered, together with a letter from its author "that the story of the Magi . . . was his own original conception, the facts being based on the Gospel of St. Matthew, and not on any ancient Hebrew manuscripts."³⁷ When sentenced, Mahan was probably somewhat repentant, judged by the light penalty he received, and its justification by a fellow minister

³⁵Ibid., p. 148.

³⁶All following quotations on the trial proceedings come from the *Boonville Weekly Advertiser*, 2 October 1885.

³⁷In addition to the newspaper report, Wallace's widow printed the notarized statement sent to the trial as follows: "The book *Ben-Hur* was not in whole or part founded upon a European translation of any such manuscript into European or other language. Previous to the writing and publication of *Ben-Hur* I had neither read, seen, nor heard of any manuscript Hebrew story found in Constantinople or elsewhere." *Lew Wallace, An Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1906), 2:943. For Mrs. Wallace's editing, see p. 796.

“in view of his age and his long years of service in the ministry.” The newspaper then had grounds to believe that it had written “the concluding act in the Mahan matter”:

Mr. Mahan went down to St. Louis, Tuesday evening. He seemed very much affected at the verdict. He promised to take the books from on sale and said that out of 2,000 printed, only about 1,200 had been disposed of—these at \$1.50 each.³⁸

MAJOR REVISION, 1887

But the discipline of his Presbytery only forced Mahan to delete Eli's chapter from further printings. His next edition, issued from St. Louis in 1887, only two years after his trial, is substantially what circulates now as the *Archko Volume*. That strange title was first conferred in an 1896 edition and is possibly phonetic shorthand for the *Archeological Writings* of the title page from 1884. In any event, Mahan's further alterations were notorious among his fellow ministers, who had received application for Mahan's full reinstatement after his suspension had terminated. His Presbytery adopted the following report from the investigating committee:

Whereas, This Pres., at its session in Slater, Sept. 29th, 1885, did suspend from the functions of the ministry, for one year, W. D. Mahan; said one year terminating on the 29th of the present month; and

Whereas, The definite form of said suspension was more the result of sympathy for him and his family, than a desire for rigid administration of the law, and this sympathy being exercised under the hope that said W. D. Mahan would use all proper efforts to heal the wounds his course had inflicted; and

Whereas, It now comes to the knowledge of this Pres., that he still occupies the same position by the sale of his publications and by negotiations to bring out new editions, therefore:

Resolved, That the suspension of the said W. D. Mahan, be and the same is hereby declared indefinite, or, until he shall have complied with the law of the Church, as it applies in the case.³⁹

³⁸*Boonville Weekly Advertiser*, 2 October 1885. This issue is the source of all quotations in the text after footnote 36.

³⁹Records of the New Lebanon Presbytery, 4:185-86. Published national minutes show no later reinstatement of Mahan in the New Lebanon Presbytery.

If Mahan's story has been drawn out, it is the most tangible thing that the historian may focus upon. The first step in authenticating a new document is examining the original for age, style of handwriting, and origin. In two decades of controversy before his death, Mahan gave no clue for evaluating his manuscripts, other than to write weakly that "the time has been too long and the distance to the place where the records are kept is too great for all men to make the examination for themselves."⁴⁰ Eli's "parchment" in Constantinople evaporated, and the remaining documents were never found. With classical training, Quarles went for the heart of the matter—the originals—and got responsible reports from Rome and Constantinople that were utterly negative. Mahan made the mistake of giving precise locations for his manuscripts. For instance, he claimed the Jewish records were at Constantinople, deposited by Constantine in 337 and supposedly known by Mohammed, who "had given orders to preserve these sacred scrolls in the mosque of St. Sophia" (a bizarre statement, since Mohammed died 800 years before his followers took Constantinople in 1453).⁴¹

As to physical description, Mahan left no doubt as to what should be found at Constantinople. A prominent item was one of the fifty Bibles made for Constantine by Eusebius, "nicely cased, marked with the Emperor's name and date upon it." Though this record ought to have been in Greek, Mahan found a "parchment in large, bold, Latin characters, quite easy to read":

I judge it to be about two and a half by four feet square, and two feet thick. It is well bound, with a gold plate, twelve by sixteen inches, on the front, with a cross and a man hanging on the cross, with the inscription, "Jesus, the Son of God, crucified for the sins of the world."⁴²

In addition, Mahan described five Hebrew records that were supposed to have been there, including the two reports of Caiaphas. These were written in "square Hebrew," in letters "from a half-inch to an inch in size, so that one can imagine what a roll of parchment it would take to record a deed."⁴³ Such huge scrolls were only one type of book. Another was on "fine sheep or goat skin, about eight by twelve inches . . .

⁴⁰Mahan, *Archko Volume*, p. 20.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 43-44, 119.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴³*Ibid.*, pp. 117-18.

bound between cedar boards, with clasps, and containing from eight to forty sheets to the book."⁴⁴ Such was the ill-fated record of Ben. Eli, "written and bound between two cedar boards."⁴⁵

Quarles set out to verify the existence of such books, directing letters to Christian circles in Constantinople. Requests to examine St. Sophia's library involved the American ambassador, now Lew Wallace himself. Elias Riggs, respected missionary-linguist of a half-century's residence in Turkey, wrote a letter reporting careful attempts to find Mahan's originals. He stated that St. Sophia held no manuscripts in either Greek, Latin, or Hebrew, and that no such persons as Mahan or McIntosh had examined books there, a fact established by an American delegation of officials, scholars, and interpreters:

Zia Bey, the librarian, received us courteously and gave us every facility for freely inspecting the Library. We found it to consist of some five or six thousand volumes, nearly all Arabic or Persian. We found nothing like the large uncial Greek Bible from the days of the Emperor Constantine, or the Jewish Talmud, or any ancient Hebrew records or manuscripts. We looked over the catalogue of the Library, and found no information of the existence of any such works. The librarian assured us *that no such works exist in the Library, nor anything whatever remaining from the time of the Turkish conquest. . . .*

He stated, in answer to our inquiries, that he had been librarian of this Library for about twenty-five years, and that in that time the only foreigners who have had access to the Library, before our visit of this morning, were the French Empress Eugenie, the Emperor of Austria, and the Shah of Persia.⁴⁶

CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE PRESENT EDITION

The lack of manuscripts proves the counterfeit content of the *Archko Volume*. Its present form (without "Eli's Story

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 118.

⁴⁵Mahan, *Archeological Writings*, p. 113.

⁴⁶Elias Riggs to Rev. J. A. Quarles, D. D., Constantinople, 21 February 1885, cited in J. A. Quarles, "Further Evidence as to Mr. Mahan's Book," *Boonville Weekly Advertiser*, 27 March 1885, and the *Weekly Topic* of the same date. Cf. confirming information and documents in *Lew Wallace, An Autobiography*, 2:943-45, though the editor is mistaken in stating that Riggs was not present at the formal examination. Goodspeed, *Hoaxes*, pp. 40-41, documents a second attempt (in 1898) to locate Mahan's originals, with a totally negative official report returned. Quarles' private notes indicate similar searches and similar results for Mahan's supposed Vatican documents. See the *Boonville Weekly Topic*, 20 February 1885.

of the Magi”), includes Mahan’s long introduction plus documents attributed to ten ancient personalities. One of these is authentic: Constantine’s letter to Eusebius requesting the fifty copies of the scriptures. Yet Mahan could not even tell the story straight about that, since he maintained that he “transcribed” it from the “first page” of the massive Bible with the gold plate on the top, whereas it is word for word the stilted English of the translation of the *Life of Constantine* circulating in Mahan’s day.⁴⁷ Since remaining “manuscripts do not relate to known history, a brief survey in sequence will display their fairy-tale atmosphere.

“*Jonathan’s Interview with the Bethlehem Shepherds.*” An investigator from the Sanhedrin talks with two shepherds, who tell of seeing the sign on the night of Jesus’ birth. Although Luke gives few details of the experience, the many given here mostly correspond with those in *Ben-Hur*. For instance, Lew Wallace portrayed a light “soft and white, like the moon’s” starting at an immeasurable height, and “dropping as from a window in the sky,” resting with a “pale corona” along the hilltop near the town. Mahan’s shepherds experienced the same light, flaring “high up in the heavens” like “the brightest moon,” which would then “descend in softer rays and light up the hills and valleys.”⁴⁸ That night, said the shepherds, the people gathered “almost scared to death,” and the village priest, Melker, joyously reported the fulfillment of prophecy. So Jonathan also visited him, and Melker remembered the wise men in terms suspiciously reminiscent of *Ben-Hur*. He also showed Jonathan “many quotations on the tripod respecting the matter”—a duplication of Wallace’s scene of Hillel reading prophecy about Bethlehem from “the parchment on the tripod.”⁴⁹

“*Melker, Priest of the Synagogue of Bethlehem,*” to the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. Jonathan had called the author of this letter “well versed in the prophecies.”⁵⁰ Judged by his writing, he is a great name-dropper of prophets but has not

⁴⁷Mahan, *Archko Volume*, pp. 61-62, and Eusebius Pamphilus, *Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine*, vol. 1 in *The Greek Ecclesiastical Historians of the First Six Centuries of the Christian Era* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1845), 1:202-3. In the letter of about 250 words, only two words are different in these versions, plus two plurals reduced to singulars, proving that Mahan “transcribed” an English translation, not a Greek or Latin document.

⁴⁸Cf. Mahan, *Archko Volume*, p. 65, with Wallace, *Ben-Hur*, pp. 53, 57.

⁴⁹Cf. Mahan, *Archko Volume*, p. 66 with Wallace, *Ben-Hur*, p. 68.

⁵⁰Mahan, *Archko Volume*, p. 67.

one prophecy to discuss. The ten pages of digression say little with much jargon, including this gem referring to the births of Mary and Elizabeth:

It is, however, most satisfactory to see and hear that the divine grandeur and authority of the sacred oracles are in no way dependent on the solution of carnal critics, but rest on an inward light shining everywhere out of the bosom of a profound organic unity and an interconnected relation with a consistent and united teleology; overleaping all time, the historical present as well as the past, and all the past brought to light in these two events that have just transpired.⁵¹

The village priest is indeed learned, but not in Hebrew thought or idiom. The more lucid parts of the Melker letter read like a Bible dictionary or Christian sermon on prophecy, but give no history of Jesus or his time.

"*Gamaliel's Interview*" with Joseph, Mary and Messalian. Though the Gospels speak of Jesus as the carpenter's son from Nazareth, Gamaliel finds his parents in "Mecca" in "Ammon or Moab."⁵² Mahan's Joseph is an exaggerated copy of Wallace's. In *Ben-Hur* Jesus' father's face is "stolid as a mask," and in the Gamaliel interview he is "gross and glum"; in *Ben-Hur* Joseph's "will was slow, like his mind," and in the Gamaliel interview he is "but a poor talker, and it seems that yes and no are the depth of his mind."⁵³ The last phrases are more at home in rural Missouri than ancient Palestine, and they are liberally supplemented with Gamaliel saying that Jesus comes from "a third-rate family"; that Joseph does not think "he will ever amount to much"; that Mary reports that Jesus always prevails, "no odds what was the subject," though he takes "little interest in . . . the great questions of the day."⁵⁴ The interview picks up other personages, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and Messalian. The latter, perhaps a corruption of the Messala of *Ben-Hur*, is an old ex-priest near Bethany, "a man of great learning, and well skilled in the laws and prophets." This is favorite language for Mahan's Jews, since his Jonathan called the Bethlehem priest "a man of great learning and well versed in the prophecies."⁵⁵ Messalian and

⁵¹Ibid., p. 69.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 79, 82. A possible event for a stopover on the way from Egypt, but in Mahan's setting, the family is living there and Jesus was born "some twenty-six years before" (ibid., p. 93; cf. p. 82).

⁵³Cf. ibid., pp. 79-80 with Wallace, *Ben-Hur*, p. 47.

⁵⁴Mahan, *Archko Volume*, pp. 80-81, 84-85.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 87, 67.

Jesus read the law and prophets together, though one wonders why, since Jesus “could read from the beginning” without instruction and is infallibly right in quoting every scripture by memory.⁵⁶

Two Reports “of Caiaphas to the Sanhedrin.” Mahan’s favorite mechanism is a report to an investigating body, in this case the Sanhedrin, requiring information from its chief officer on Jesus’ trial. In the real world such a report would be superfluous, since that body itself heard Jesus and needed no such information. But Mahan’s Caiaphas sentenced Jesus with “the whole court belonging to the high priest, containing twelve members,” a contradiction of the account in the Gospels of Jesus’ trial before “all the council,” seventy besides the high priest.⁵⁷ Mahan’s Caiaphas tells how he sent Jesus to Pilate for an interview and “did not expect him to execute him,” but “it seems that Pilate thirsted for his blood”—the very opposite of both the Gospel trial accounts and Mahan’s report of Pilate.⁵⁸ Mahan’s Caiaphas finally has a personal vision of Jesus, who takes a rather casual view of his scheming: “You condemned me that you might go free. . . . Your only wrong is, you have a wicked heart.” Mahan’s high priest next resigns, requesting the Sanhedrin to “appoint Jonathan” in his place, a jarring story to anyone who knows from Josephus that Roman governors appointed high priests and deposed them (as they did Caiaphas) and not the Sanhedrin.⁵⁹ No matter if the educated leader speaks a jumble of impossible English, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin—asserting that Jesus proved “hypostatical” or displayed his “unity of trinity” (*trinitatis unitas*).⁶⁰ This Jewish official does not come from antiquity, but from *Ben-Hur*, where the crucifixion caused “the altered behavior of the high-priest,” who with his followers fearfully whispered on Calvary: “The man might be the Messiah, and then—But they would wait and see.”⁶¹ Although Mahan’s Caiaphas knows the resurrected Christ through an appearance, he weakly adopts the agnosticism of the novel. “If this strange personage is from God . . . I have

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 91-92.

⁵⁷Cf. *ibid.*, p. 113 with Matthew 26:59 and Mark 15:1.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 115-16.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 126-27.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 105.

⁶¹Wallace, *Ben-Hur*, pp. 541-42.

been the means of crucifying him . . . but I will wait and see how these things will develop."⁶²

The History of Velleius Paterculus. Mahan misspells the name of this Roman historian (calling him "Valleus") but doubly perverts his history, first claiming "his works have been thought to be extinct." That is a strange statement, since Mahan's detailed data on Velleius obviously came from a standard classical dictionary (the wording is close to Anthon's), which would also have described the well-known contents of Velleius' history. But after creating the fictitious vacuum, Mahan proceeds to fill it by claiming to have found a lost manuscript "in the Vatican at Rome." Velleius' real history says nothing of Palestine, but Mahan invents a Judean visit for this Roman, who can then report "one of the most remarkable characters he had ever seen," Jesus, who heals, helps the poor, and alienates rich Jews because of his popular following. By apparent accident Mahan picked a historian known for laudatory language, but Velleius penned praise to Tiberius, not Christ, whom he evidently never knew.⁶³

"*Pilate's Report.*" This nucleus of Mahan's publications was printed in the "word for word" transcript in 1878, only to be expanded by about 1400 words in the 1884 edition, a forty percent growth. Its first form was historically unconvincing and Pilate's character sentimentally Victorian. But the post-*Ben-Hur* rewrite added that novel's atmosphere, down to the precise detail of finding the aged Balthasar's corpse on Golgotha as the gloom lifted and the earth ceased to shake.⁶⁴ Mahan's fabrications emerge clearly in such changes of the story, which originally had Pilate with "a handful of soldiers" unable to save Jesus, though the overdone conclusion had 2,000 troops marching into Jerusalem a day too late. In the 1884 revision this ending disappeared, and Pilate stood against the Jewish nation with "only one centurion and a hundred men at my command."⁶⁵ Rome may have had marginal numbers in Judea, but this is absurd, as the reader of the account of Paul's arrest in Jerusalem knows. The Roman commander determined that Paul's life was endangered and quickly called "two cen-

⁶²Mahan, *Archko Volume*, pp. 126-27.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 128-29, the source for all quotations on Velleius.

⁶⁴Cf. *ibid.*, p. 142 with Wallace, *Ben-Hur*, book 8, chapter 10.

⁶⁵Mahan, *Archko Volume*, p. 130. Such numbers make Caiaphas' worry contradictory: "But Tiberias [sic] has turned against us; Pilate has removed the army from Caesarea to Jerusalem" (p. 112).

turions” with orders to muster 400 soldiers and 70 horse by nightfall to escort Paul out of Jerusalem (Acts 23:23). This tribune commanded a “cohort” (Greek *speira*, Acts 21:31), a unit that Josephus states was either “a thousand infantry” or “six hundred infantry and a hundred and twenty cavalry.”⁶⁶ The same word describes Jesus’ torment “by the whole band” (King James Version: Matthew 27:27, Mark 15:16), meaning the Jerusalem cohort or, in present terms, “battalion” (Revised Standard Version). And this was only a part of the manpower available to the governor, including other units in Caesarea.

“*Herod Antipater’s Defense Before the Roman Senate.*” The charge is apparently slaughtering the infants at Bethlehem, which makes the title (and supposed signature at the end) the first blunder, for Herod the Great was not called Antipas. His basic answer: “So I saw an insurrection brewing fast, and nothing but a most bloody war as the consequence.” Caiaphas had made his report in the same Missouri idiom: “So that I saw that a bloody insurrection was brewing fast.”⁶⁷ The only events related in Herod’s report are those imagined in the fiction of *Ben-Hur*. Melodramatic details that Wallace added to Matthew are lifted by Mahan’s Herod: the strange men inquiring at the gate for the Jewish king, Herod calling a regular body of scholars headed by Hillel, and reading the Bethlehem prophecy from a parchment as the climax of this scene.⁶⁸ Since such details are not in ancient records, the interrelationship of the Archko documents and modern fiction is again apparent.

“*Herod Antipas’ Defence Before the Roman Senate.*” In real history Herod Antipas travelled to Italy to influence the Emperor Caius (or Gaius, nicknamed Caligula) against his brother Agrippa. But Agrippa learned of the plot and sent his emissary with letters accusing Antipas of having conspired with Sejanus before his fall and continuing his disloyalty by planning revolt, proof of which was his storage of equipment for 70,000 soldiers. As told by Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.7.22) Antipas admitted holding these supplies and was ban-

⁶⁶*Jewish War* 3:67. For military units in Palestine see T. R. S. Broughton, “The Roman Army,” in F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, *Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. 5 in *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Macmillan, 1939):439-41.

⁶⁷Mahan, *Archko Volume*, pp. 137, 130.

⁶⁸Wallace, *Ben-Hur*, book 1, chapters 6, 13.

ished. Mahan adapted this story, which he obviously found in Josephus. In the new version, Agrippa writes the Roman Senate to answer for holding the 70,000 arms, referring to "my accuser, Caius" and mentioning the charge of conspiring with "Sejonius." This form of Sejanus' name is not historical, but is Mahan's adaptation, like the "Sejane" of one of his earlier documents.⁶⁹ He consistently modified his names to approximate real ones, just as he clearly altered history to create his stories.

"*The Hillel Letters.*" Mahan appended nearly 90 pages as a tedious finale, seven letters "regarding God's providence to the Jews" by "Hillel the Third." Hillel the Third is numbered from Hillel the Great, contemporaneous with Herod the Great, personalities immediately prior to the Christian era. Mahan adds two namesakes unknown in history. "Hillel the Second" supposedly compiled records "soon after the destruction of the holy city" (about A. D. 70).⁷⁰ There is another reference to a compiler Hillel, who "lived about one hundred years after the Christian era,"⁷¹ either Mahan's second or third Hillel, so the latter can be no earlier than the second century after Christ. This much squares with quotations by "Hillel the Third" from Tacitus and Suetonius, who both wrote at the beginning of that century. That Mahan intended this time-frame is proved by repeated references to the destruction of the temple in the Hillel letters. The letters mourn the "forsaken and desolate" city and temple;⁷² city, temple, and nation "are all gone";⁷³ "our holy city is no more," and the temple is "razed to its foundation."⁷⁴ Nothing could be more settled—until one picks up the line, "I heard Peter preach the other day, and as he and John came out of the temple there was a man that had been lying around at the gates and public crossings for years."⁷⁵ Suddenly the temple is just as it was, and the healing of the lame man at the gate is narrated with the full details of Acts 3, with a date of about A. D. 35. Since

⁶⁹Mahan, *Archko Volume*, pp. 158, 111. Mahan's fictitious Jewish official "Hilderium" (p. 158) is an apparent modification of the *Ben-Hur* sheik, Ilderum.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 58.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 30.

⁷²Ibid., p. 163.

⁷³Ibid., p. 212.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 179.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 165.

this chronology is hopeless, the four-page sermon of Peter afterward could be no better.

Indeed, "Hillel the Third" is not merely a man without a homeland, but a man without a time. He can quote second-century authors and yet date Alexander the Great's accession "three hundred and eighty years ago": with a writing date of A. D. 44.⁷⁶ Sometimes he can stay in this framework, naming Pompey's invasion of Palestine "about one hundred years ago," with a writing date of about A. D. 37.⁷⁷ But he regresses a generation by stating that Croesus' kingdom fell to Cyrus "five hundred and forty years ago," with a writing date of about 6 B. C.⁷⁸ Harmonious with this, Rome was founded "about seven hundred and fifty years ago": using 753 B. C. as the founding, and a writing date of 3 B. C.⁷⁹ These statements have "Hillel the Third" writing before he was born. Yet that contradiction is minor compared to the shock of the next page, where the Roman Senate is "a body, which, for more than a thousand years, for talent, for weight, for wisdom and experience, was unrivalled in the history of the world."⁸⁰ What is intended is precise, for "their monarchy lasted about two hundred years" from the founding.⁸¹ So the Senate dominated (as popular history once stressed) from the sixth century before Christ to the fourth century after Christ, an amended writing date of A. D. 491. Since Hillel the Third is not Methuselah, this performance does more than raise doubt.⁸²

Such confusion only hints at the historical oddities contained in the meaningless essays of "Hillel the Third." They are dreary historical romanticizing in nineteenth-century prose, to which pages of Christian apologetic are added. We are asked to believe that a Jew steeped in scriptures and law would speak of Athens "with her exquisite arts, her literature, and her science, with her constellations of genius just ready to burst upon the world."⁸³ The learned Rabbi sets aside his own culture and religion to award first prize to the Greeks,

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 194.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 201.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 187.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 198.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 199.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 198.

⁸²After the above material was in finished manuscript, I received Quarles' critique of the Hillel III section, published in the *Boonville Weekly Topic*, 9 January 1885. It is both a coincidence and a vindication that he exposes the same chronological weaknesses, ending with the parallel to Methuselah.

⁸³Mahan, *Archko Volume*, p. 190.

who "went on to create the most beautiful literature and the profoundest philosophy that human genius has ever produced."⁸⁴ Nor is he more convincing as the wordy Christian of the last letter, enthusiastically arguing for the "unobjectionable testimony" of Matthew and John and the "collateral proof" of Luke and Mark, who heard the apostles "rehearse over and over the wonderful story of the teachings and miracles of Jesus."⁸⁵ Here Mahan does too well, not only rising above the identity of his Jewish Rabbi, but exceeding his own style so far that plagiarism from history texts and Christian works must be assumed. Those excited by searching out sources might begin with some modern historical clichés of "Hillel the Third": Rome as "a straggling village on the banks of the Tiber" or Alexander "entering Asia with the sword in one hand and the poems of Homer in the other."⁸⁶

CONCLUSION

In perspective, Goodspeed was well justified in labelling Pilate's report "a weak, crude fancy, a jumble of high-sounding but meaningless words, and hardly worth serious criticism," a judgment just as applicable to all 200 pages of "ancient" sources in the present *Archko Volume*.⁸⁷ And the same weaknesses characterize Mahan's 50-page introduction, a verbose and misleading survey of scholarship on early manuscripts, with his own discoveries added to the honor role. The same mind, with its talent for historical adaptation, modified names, and anachronism, created both. Yet survival of the *Archko Volume* might even encourage the historian, since it proves deep concern for the world of the Bible. Hopefully such interest may be channeled into responsible works on New Testament archaeology and authentic translations from Jesus' century, as the Dead Sea Scrolls and Josephus,⁸⁸ who even with his shortcomings is yet "a competent historian whose works have done much to enrich our store of knowledge."⁸⁹ Only the opposite can be said of the author of the Archko collection.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 193.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 247.

⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 171, 195.

⁸⁷Goodspeed, *Hoaxes*, p. 33.

⁸⁸In addition to easily available translations of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Josephus, see C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

⁸⁹G. A. Williamson, *The World of Josephus* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964), p. 287.