

DEATH WARRANT OF JESUS CHRIST.—'Chance,' says the *Courrier des Etats Unis*, 'has just put into our hands the most imposing and interesting judicial document to all Christians that ever has been recorded in human annals,' that is the identical **death warrant** of our Lord Jesus Christ. The document was faithfully transcribed by the editor, in these words:—'Sentence rendered by Pontius Pilate, Acting-Governor of Lower Galilee, stating that Jesus of Nazareth shall suffer **death** on the cross. In the year seventeen of the Emperor Tiberius Cæsar, and the 27th day of March, the city of the holy Jerusalem—Anna and Caiphas being priests, sacrificators of the people of God—Pontius Pilate, Governor of Lower Galilee, sitting in the presidential chair of the Prætorium, condemns Jesus of Nazareth to die on the cross between two thieves—the great and notorious evidence of the people saying: 1. Jesus is a seducer. 2. He is seditious. 3. He is the enemy of the law. 4. He calls himself falsely the Son of God. 5. He calls himself falsely the King of Israel. 6. He entered into the temple, followed by a multitude bearing palm branches in their hands. Orders the first centurion, Quilius Cornelius, to lead him to the place of execution. Forbids any person whomsoever, either poor or rich, to oppose the **death** of Jesus Christ. The witnesses who signed the condemnation of Jesus, are—1. Daniel Robani, a Pharisee. 2. Joannus Robani. 3. Raphael Robani. 4. Capel, a citizen. Jesus shall go out of the city of Jerusalem by the gate Struenus.' The above sentence is engraved on a copper plate, on one side are written these words: 'A similar plate is sent to each tribe.' It was found in an antique vase of white marble, while excavating in the ancient city of Aquila, in the kingdom of Naples, in the year 1810, and was discovered by the commissioners of arts of the French armies. At the expedition of Naples, it was inclosed in a box of ebony, as the sacristy of the Chartem. The French translation was made by the commissaries of arts. The original is in the Hebrew language.—*N. Y. Evening Post*.

THE DEATH WARRANT OF JESUS CHRIST: A REVIEW

THEODORE TURNER

INTRODUCTION

The Death Warrant of Jesus Christ has shown up at various times as evidence that not only that Jesus existed but that he also was crucified on March 25, 34 AD. In the case of Millerite history, this document was presented by Samuel Snow, in a letter that was published in *The Midnight Cry!* of May 2, 1844, as evidence that Jesus was crucified in 31 AD. The date given, in the source used by Snow, had the date of March 25 for Christ's crucifixion – a Sunday. Other versions of this news story present a variety of dates. We will look at these sources and show why this article used by Snow is *Fake News*. This does not undo Snow's conclusions. In fact, we will show that this confirms the repeat of Millerite history in our time.

EXTERNAL TESTIMONY

Where did this *Death Warrant* come from? Can we trace its origins? It may be impossible to trace its origin to its source but we can see that it is published in various forms and in various periodicals, from time to time.¹ The claims of the articles themselves, we will address later. What we look for here are the places where we find it published.

The first place we find this document come to light is June 8, 1839, in the Niles National Register.

DEATH WARRANT of JESUS CHIST. Of the many interesting relics and fragments of antiquity which have been brought to light by the persevering researches of modern philosophy, none could have more interest for the philanth[*sic*] rophist and the believer, than one which we copy below. "Chance," says the Courier des Etats Unis, "has just put into our hands the most imposing and interesting judicial document to all Christians, that ever has been recorded in human annals: that is the identical death warrant of our Lord JESUS CHRIST." The document was faithfully transcribed by the editor, and is in hac verba: - Sentence rendered by Pontious [*sic*] Pilate, acting governor of Lower Gallilee [*sic*], stating that Jesus of Nazareth shall suffer death on the cross. In the year seventeen of the emperor Tiberious Caesar and the 25th day of March, the city of the holy Jerusalem, Anna and Caiphas being priests, sacrificators of the people of God, Pontious Pilate, governor of lower Gallilee, sitting on the presidential chair of the Paetory [*sic*], condemns Jesus of Nazareth to die on the cross between two thieves—the great and notorious evidence of the people saying—

1. Jesus is a seducer.
2. He is seditious,
3. He is an enemy of the law.
- . 4. He calls himself falsely the Son of God.
5. He calls himself falsely the King of Israel.
6. He entered into the temple, followed by a multitude bearing palm branches in their hands

Order the first centurion, Quillus Cornelius, to lead him to the place of execution. Forbid to any person whomsoever, either poor or rich, to oppose the death of Jesus, The witnesses who signed the condemnation of Jesus are, viz:—1. Daniel Robani, a Pharisee; 2 Joannas Rorobable; 3. Ralphael Robani; 4. Capet, a citizen. - Jesus shall go out of the city of Jerusalem by the gate of Struenus."

The above sentence is engraved on a copper plate; on one side are written these words:—"A similar plate is sent to each tribe." It was found in an antique vase of white marble, while excavating in the ancient city of Aquilla, in the kingdom of Naples, in the year 1820, and was discovered by the commissaries of arts attached to the French

¹ Here we give them in chronological order, prior to May 2, 1844: - *Niles National Register*, June 8, 1839; *The Baltimore Sun*, November 18, 1839; *The Evangelist*, December 1, 1839; *Democrat and Herald*, December 7, 1839; *The Greensboro Patriot*, December 17, 1839; *Logansport Telegraph*, January 04, 1840; *Times and Seasons*, October 1, 1841;

armies. At the expedition of Naples, it was found enclosed in a box, of ebony in the sacristy of the chartrem. The vase in the chapel of caserta. The French translation was made by the members of the commission of arts. The original is in the Hebrew language. The chartrem requested earnestly that the plate should not be taken away from them. The request was granted, as a reward for the sacrifice they had made for the army. M. DENON, one of the savans, caused a plate to be made of the same model, on which he had engraved the above sentence. At the sale of his collection of antiquities &c. it was bought by lord Howard for 2,890 francs. Its intrinsic value and interest are much greater. [Phil. Gaz.]

Though this is the first source we find, it is unlikely that it is the original source. It contains a number of typographical errors that are not copied in later editions, though *Paetory is found as Proctory, Praetory and Traetory*.

The Christian Science Monitor contains a version of this document that claims to be reprinted from an article found in an old Bible.

“Death Warrant of Jesus Christ,” *Christian Science Journal*, Vol. 13 (January 1896), p. 423. [reprinted from — *Phil. Gazette*. NOTE. The newspaper cutting from which the above is copied, was found pasted in an old Bible printed in 1822. Date of newspaper cannot now be ascertained.— IDA P. HUNT.]

....

In the year seventeen of the Emperor Tiberius Caesar, and the 27th day of March, the city of Holy Jerusalem, Anna and Caiaphus being priests, sacrificators of the people of God, Pontius Pilate, Governor of Lower Galilee, sitting in the presidential chair, of the Praetory, condemns Jesus of Nazareth to die on the cross between two thieves — the great and notorious evidence of the people saying —

1. Jesus is a seducer.
2. He is seditious.
3. He is the enemy of the law.
4. He calls himself falsely the Son of God.
5. He calls himself falsely the King of Israel.
6. He entered into the temple, followed by a multitude bearing palm branches in their hands.

Orders the first Centurion, Quilius Cornelius, to lead him to the place of execution.

Forbids any person, whomsoever, either poor or rich to oppose the death of Jesus Christ....

The fact that this document has the date March 27 is an indication that it is a later source. The oldest sources have March 25 (Gregorian date for 31 AD) for the date of the crucifixion while new sources have “corrected” it to March 27 (Julian date for 31 AD). The article is also somewhat appended, with additions to the text.

SAMUEL SNOW’S SOURCE

DEATH WARRANT OF JESUS CHRIST.

Sentence rendered by Pontius Pilate, acting Governor of Lower Galilee, stating that Jesus of Nazareth shall suffer death on the cross;

"In the year seventeen of the Emperor Tiberius Caesar, and the 25th day of March, the city of the holy Jerusalem, Annas and Caiaphas being priests, sacrificators of the people of God, Pontius Pilate, Governor of Lower Galilee, sitting on the presidential chair of the Practory, condemns Jesus of Nazareth to die on the cross between two thieves—the great and notorious evidence of the people, saying:

"1. Jesus is a seducer.

"2. He is seditious.

"3. He is an enemy of the law.

"4. He calls himself, falsely, the son of God.

"5. He calls himself, falsely, the king of Israel.

"6. He entered the temple, followed by a multitude bearing palm branches in their hands.

"Order the first centurion, Quillus Cornelius, to lead him to the place of execution." Forbid to any person whomsoever, either poor or rich, to oppose the death of Jesus.

"The witnesses who signed the condemnation of; Jesus are, viz : 1. Daniel Robani, a pharisee ; 2. Joannas Rorababel ; 3. Raphael Robani ; 4. Capet, a citizen. "Jesus shall go out of the city of Jerusalem by the gate of Struenus."

The above sentence is engraved on copperplate. On one side are written these words : "A similar plate is sent to each tribe." It was found in an antique vase of white marble, while excavating in the ancient city of Aquilla, in the kingdom of Naples, in the year 1820, and was discovered by the commissaries of arts attached to the French armies, at the expedition of Naples. It was found enclosed in a box of ebony, in the sacristy of the Chartrem. The vase is in the chapel of Caserta. The French translation was made by the members of the commission of arts. The original is in the Hebrew language. The Chartrem requested earnestly that the plates should not be taken away from them, and the request was granted, as a reward for the sacrifice they had made for the army. M. Denon, one of the Savans, caused a plate to be made of the same model, on which he had engraved the above sentence. At the sale of his antiquities, &c., it was bought by Lord Howard for 2890 francs. Its intrinsic value and interest are much greater.—[Philadelphia Gazette.]

The above is as found in the May 2, edition of *The Midnight Cry!* It is not prefaced with the original source as being the *Courier des Etats Unis*, though it does have the *Philadelphia Gazette* as a secondary source. So far, we have been unable to find the *Gazette* source. Some versions have the *N.Y. Evening Post*. As with each of the sources, we find no record of such an article. Both the *Gazette* and the *Post* had ceased publication in the early 1830's. What direct source Samuel Snow is referencing here, we do not know. We do know that in 1863, he references the "New York Evangelist, of Dec.' 7, 1839" as his source.²

What we can conclude is that there is no external evidence that this document ever existed. The story is a classic example of *Fake News*. These types of stories were common in that period of history, just as they are today. They helped sell newspapers. The story only shows up in the American papers and nowhere else, until more than fifty years later.

In 1871, a similar fraud appeared in the British press.

"Jesus of Nazareth, of the Jewish tribe of Juda, convicted of imposture and rebellion against the divine authority of Tiberius Augustus, Emperor of the Romans, having for this sacrilege been condemned to die on the cross by sentence of the Judge, Pontius Pilate, on the prosecution of our lord Herod, lieutenant of the Emperor in Judea, shall be taken to-morrow morning, 23rd day of the ides of March, to the usual place of punishment, under the escort of a company of the Praetorian guard. The so-called King of the Jews shall be taken out by the Strumean gate. All the public officers and the subjects of the Emperor are directed to lend their aid to the execution of this sentence.

"(Signed) Capel.

" Jerusalem 22nd day of the ides of March, year of Rome 783."

² *The Voice of Elias*, Samuel Sheffield Snow, 1863, p. 57. It could be a reference to *The Evangelist* of December 1, 1839.

We mention this here, in that there are a number of odd similarities, such as the order including an unknown gate (in this case the Strumean, rather than the Struenus). It is either an intentional (though poor) attempt on improving upon the previous fraud or a mangled reconstruction from someone's memory. Of even greater interest are the March 22nd date for the order and the March 23rd date for the crucifixion. The writer should know that Jesus was crucified the same day he was condemned. As well, the 23rd for the crucifixion makes no sense. It is as if they picked the only possible date from 29 to 33 AD, upon which a Passover was impossible. If it were done intentionally, they would have been choosing 34 AD for the crucifixion, as that is the only possible year that it could have occurred on that date.

Whatever the source of Snow's article, it is not an ancient copper scroll. We will show this further.

INTERNAL TESTIMONY

From the internal testimony, it is easy to show that the document is a fake, even if it had existed.

As we have already pointed out, the document is claimed to have inconsistent dates for the crucifixion of Christ, from what we know of the Hebrew calendar in the time of Christ. Jesus was crucified on Friday, April 27, 31 AD. A Friday crucifixion is not possible in March of 31 AD and only has a 6% possibility, even in April.³ In March of 31 AD, the full moon is on the 27th but it is a Tuesday. The Passover is always after the astronomical full moon, and never before.⁴ If the Jews had celebrated the Passover in March of 31 AD, it would have been on the Wednesday, March 28. This would delight the Wednesday crucifixion theorists but would contradict the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.

However, the problem even goes deeper. Snow's source says that Jesus was crucified March 25th. This date would coincide with the full moon, only if we were using a Gregorian calendar – a calendar that would not exist until more than 1500 years after the purported writing of the *Death Warrant*. That later versions of the story “correct” this to March 27 – the calendar that did exist in the time of Christ – is strong evidence that the *Death Warrant*, if it existed, was a forgery.

Why would Pontius Pilate be “acting Governor of Lower Galilee”? Herod was the Tetrarch of Galilee. Pilate was the Governor, or prefect, of Judea. No such title of “acting Governor of Lower Galilee” is ever known to have existed and really makes no sense. *Lower Galilee* is an anachronism. Such a term was not used in the time of Christ and would not ever be used by the Romans.

The phrase “presidential chair of the *Practory*” is meaningless. It must be intended, as in some versions of the account Praetory, as in magistrate. What this *presidential chair* is, however, cannot be discerned. Once again, it is a title that is meaningless.

The charges are also inconsistent with the biblical account, especially with the charge that “He calls himself, *falsely*, the king of Israel”. Pilate would not have written this. This may have been the charge the Jews wanted but Pilate chose to have Jesus crucified *as* the king of the Jews.

And **Pilate wrote a title**, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, **JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS**. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, **Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.** (John 19:19-22)

³ The most likely date for the crucifixion, if we are to follow astronomical charts would be Thursday April 26, in 31 AD. However, if the beginning of the months preceding had been delayed due to atmospheric conditions being unfavourable for the sighting of the first crescent on the evening of the 29, this would have delayed the Passover by a day, resulting in the month beginning on the Sabbath, April 14. A calculation shows that this would occur only 6% of the time. Most scholars pick either Friday April 7, 30 AD (Protestant) or Friday April 3, 33 AD (Catholic), for Christ's crucifixion. Seventh-day Adventists are in the great minority, in choosing Friday April 27, 31 AD for Christ's crucifixion. It is often criticised as being impossible. However, though it is statistically unlikely this does not make it impossible.

⁴ This point is little understood. Simply, the Passover evening (what we would call the evening of the 13th) would always begin after the astronomical full moon. Grace Amadon documents this fact. Her research can be found here. <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1944/03/ancient-jewish-calendar-constructionno.-1>

Further the names of those who are attested as signatories to the warrant are anachronistic. We will address each one.

1. Daniel Robani; a Pharisee - No such last name exists in ancient literature. We cannot even imagine its etymology, if it is Hebrew, unless one modifies it to *Rabbani*, which means teacher.

2. Joannas Rorababel - Some versions have Rorobable. Either way, we cannot guess the origin of the name. It could be the writer thought to replace the z in Zerubbabel with an r, to make a Hebrew *sounding* name.

3. Raphael Robani - As a name, *Raphael* did not exist until the Renaissance. It would not have been a Hebrew name in the first century, even though it is derived from Hebrew.

4. Capet, a citizen - The name *Capet* is of a much later origin. Its origin is French and arose first in Gaul. It did not come into common use until the 9th century. It would not have been a name of a Roman citizen, or anyone, in the first century.

Other inconsistencies are also seen. "Jesus shall go out of the city of Jerusalem by the gate of Struenus". What gate this is, no one knows. This name only exists in this *Death Warrant*. "A similar plate is sent to each tribe." Since the northern ten tribes did not exist for over 700 years, by the time of Jesus crucifixion, the idea that the warrant was sent to each of the tribes makes no sense. Even then, why would a death warrant be sent to each of the tribes? The fanciful description of the white marble vase, the supposed excavation in the city of Aquilla in the Naples, etc. are simply details added to make the story believable but do more to damage its authenticity, once these details are examined further. For one, there is no city of Aquilla (or Aquila) in the province of Naples. There is a city of L'Aquila in the province of L'Aquila. The only excavations that we know of that occurred there were in 1949. We can find no record of any excavations in 1810.

CONCLUSIONS

Though the document, *Death Warrant of Jesus Christ* is a forgery, if it existed, or, at the least, a fake news story from the 1840's, it should not be a problem to those understanding the increase of light from Millerite history. The document was not needed as proof that Jesus was crucified in 31 AD. That Snow believed it to be a valid document should have no bearing upon whether or not the midnight cry message is true. We have false reports circulating in our history. Mistakes were part of their history and of ours. Snow also failed to place the baptism of Christ in the fall of 27 AD and placed it in the spring. We now understand this differently. Should we then pick at every detail, placing doubt upon the things that can be verified?

Some, in spite of all of the evidence, believe since we cannot (in their minds) *prove* the document is fake, we must accept the possibility it is real. Some see a need for it to be a valid document. This is a backward argument. If there is no evidence the document ever existed, there is no reason to believe that it did exist. Reports in American papers are not evidence, especially when we cannot even verify a source. Yet, even if the document did exist, there would be no reason to accept it as the real death warrant of Jesus Christ, in that it contradicts the biblical account. It cannot be used to support a Friday crucifixion of Christ in 31 AD. Our fear is that some will try to use it to do so.

Some may consider that the issue is not an important one and that if some choose to accept it as valid, we should not object. We would have to disagree. Placing Christ's crucifixion on Friday April 27, 31 AD is an important truth. We would argue that it is a foundational truth, in that we cannot have the 2300 days end in the fall of 1844 without it. Without a correct understanding of the prophetic periods, we build a foundation upon shifting sand.

THE DEATH WARRANT OF JESUS CHRIST⁵

***Page 130-**“The Lord” of whom Arculf was speaking is Jesus Christ. In his 1875 unabridged edition of *Gleanings for the Curious from the Harvest-Fields of Literature*, Dr. C. C. Bombaugh shared with us some astounding archaeological evidence of his unwelcome presence on this planet by quoting a document - engraved on a copper artefact - that led to his miserable dismissal. He wrote: *Of the many interesting relics and fragments brought to light by the preserving researches of antiquarians, none could be more interesting to the philanthropist and believer than the following - to Christians the most imposing judicial document ever recorded in human annuals.* It has been faithfully transcribed as follows:

THE DEATH-WARRANT OF JESUS CHRIST

**Sentence rendered by Pontius Pilate,
Acting Governor of Lower Galilee,
Stating that Jesus of Nazareth shall suffer Death on the Cross.**

**In the year Seventeen of the Emperor Tiberius Caesar, and the 27th Day of March, the City of the Holy Jerusalem -
Annas and Caiphas being priests, sacrificators of the People of God - Pontius Pilate, Governor of Lower Galilee,
sitting in the Presidential Chair of the Praetory, Condemns Jesus of Nazareth to die on the cross between two
thieves. The great and notorious evidence of the people saying:**

- I. Jesus is a seducer.**
- II. He is seditious.**
- III. He is the enemy of the Law**
- IV. He calls himself falsely the son of God**
- V. He calls himself falsely the King of Israel**
- VI. He entered into the Temple followed by a multitude bearing palm branches in their hands.**

**Orders the first centurion, Quilus Cornelius, to lead him to the place of execution.
Forbids any whomsoever, either poor or rich, to oppose the death of Jesus Christ.**

The witnesses who signed the condemnation of Jesus are-

- I. Daniel Rabani, a Pharisee**
- II. Joannus Robani.**
- III. Raphael Robani**
- IV. Capet, a Citizen**

Jesus shall go out of the city of Jerusalem by the Gate of Struenus.

The foregoing was engraved on a copper plate, on the reverse of which is written: 'A similar plate is sent to each tribe.' It was found in an antique marble vase, while excavating the ancient city of Aquila, in the kingdom of Naples, in the year 1810, and was discovered by the Commissioners of Arts of the French Army. At the expedition of Naples it was enclosed in a box of ebony, and preserved in the sacristy of the Carthusians. The Commissioner's of Arts made the French translation. The original is in the Hebrew language.

References

Gleanings for the Curious from the Harvest-Fields of Literature by Dr. C. C. Bombaugh
The Electric Mirror on the Pharos Lighthouse and Other Ancient Lighting by Larry Radka

⁵ Excerpt from the End Notes of the *The Electric Mirror on the Pharos Lighthouse and Other Ancient Lighting* by Larry Radka