

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND THE CROSS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1930s, the Watchtower Society has taught in its publications that Jesus Christ was impaled on a single-beamed torture stake. Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide believe that the cross is alien to authentic Christianity and holds no place in Christian worship. By rendering the Greek word *σταυρος* as "cross" in their Bible translations, the churches of Christendom have allegedly imported paganism directly into the Holy Scriptures.

It would be helpful at this point to summarize the arguments advanced by the Society to support its claim that Jesus died on a mere stake (henceforth called the "torture stake" doctrine). The Bible writers used two Greek words to refer to Christ's execution instrument: *σταυρος* and *ξυλον*. The former literally meant "stake," not "cross," and therefore originally represented a simple-beamed apparatus. The second word actually meant "tree" which also suggests a simple stake. Finally, the Latin translators of the New Testament used the word *crux*, which denoted nothing more than a "stake." Hence, Jesus must have been executed on a torture stake.

The arguments favoring the translation of *σταυρος* as "stake" may at first glance seem reasonable and accurate. The many discussions published by the Society in its literature on this topic quote an impressive array of secular sources, lexicons, and Bible commentaries. The evidence appears overwhelming. Yet, when these works are consulted, the Society's position collapses like a house of cards. And when the whole body of evidence is examined, it becomes clear that this viewpoint is nothing more than a biased attempt to expunge "paganism" from Christianity, *even when the facts indicate otherwise*.

Consider, for example, the history of the Society's "torture stake" doctrine. According to the *1975 Yearbook* the doctrine did not result from careful biblical analysis, but rather from Judge Rutherford's dislike of the cross *symbol*. Originally, the Bible Students under Charles T. Russell accepted the cross as a valid Christian emblem. In fact, Russell incorporated it in his symbol of the Millennial Kingdom – a cross placed inside a crown. This "cross and crown" symbol appeared on *Watchtower* covers since 1891, and was represented on a plaque hanging in Russell's personal study.¹ The Bible Students even wore a pin of this shape. Carey W. Barber, now a member of the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses, described it: "It was a badge really, with a wreath of laurel leaves as the border and within the wreath was a crown with a cross running through it on an angle.

¹ See *Overland Monthly*, June 1909, p. 551

It looked quite attractive and was our idea of what it meant to take up our 'cross' and follow Christ Jesus in order to be able to wear the crown of victory in due time."²

Rutherford however did not think it was so "attractive." He perceived the cross as nothing more than a pagan symbol, as a long-time Witness recalled: "This to Brother Rutherford's mind was Babylonish and should be discontinued. He told us that when we went to the people's homes and began to talk, *that* was the witness in itself."³

It took Rutherford eight years to purge the Bible Students of the cross. His first move against it occurred in 1928, when he instructed his followers at a Detroit convention to discard the "objectionable" and "unnecessary" jewelry.⁴ Then in 1931 the emblem was removed from the *Watchtower* covers. At that point the cross symbol became non-biblical, non-Christian, and ungodly – and was relegated to the forbidden trappings of Satan's organization. The Witnesses however still believed that Jesus was executed on a traditional cross. This contradiction in their doctrinal system no doubt vexed Rutherford, and he saw the need to revise his assumptions about the Passion. Therefore, without much fanfare, he presented his new view in the book *Riches*. On page 27, he wrote: "Jesus was crucified, not on a cross of wood, such as exhibited in many images and pictures, and which images are made and exhibited by men; Jesus was crucified by nailing his body to a tree."⁵ It seems that Rutherford saw nothing wrong (as does the Society today) with using the word "crucify" to denote impalement.

Therefore, according to the Society's own account, scholarship really had nothing to do with its adoption of the "torture stake" doctrine. Yet, since the time Nathan H. Knorr replaced Rutherford as president, the Society has supported its stand by quoting reputable non-Watchtower sources. This article will examine the validity of the Society's official position on the matter, and will demonstrate that the Witnesses have been misled by false argumentation into believing that the "torture stake" doctrine is Bible truth and that no evidence exists indicating that Jesus died on a traditional cross.

II. THE SEMANTIC ISSUE

The arguments advanced by the Society to maintain the "torture stake" doctrine are based solely on semantic grounds, that *σταυρος*, *ξύλον*, and *crux* did not refer to a two-beamed cross in the first century. The Society has never appealed to archaeological or historical evidence to prove that Jesus Christ had indeed died in the manner proclaimed by the Witnesses, although the New World Translation Committee once expressed confidence that this type of evidence would eventually turn up.⁶

Since dictionaries are widely used in our culture, the Society has assumed that a word's meaning is merely its dictionary definition. It further claims that only the etymological or basic meaning of a word is correct. For example, in one instance the Watchtower exegetes state that *σταυρος* and *ξύλον* can only be understood "according to their

² *1975 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1974), p. 148.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, according to Grant Suiter, the late secretary/treasurer of the Society.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: 1950), p. 771: "This is a revolutionary translation [i.e., rendering *σταυρος* as "torture stake"], we admit, but it is the purest one. The passing of time and further archaeological discoveries will be certain to prove its correctness."

simplest meanings.”⁷ This approach however is as misguided as insisting that the word “gun” be limited to matchlocks and muskets. As technology evolves, so do the meanings of the words used to refer to technological artifacts. Today “gun” may readily refer to semi-automatic rifles and artillery cannons. The words *σταυρος* and *crux*, referring to an ancient piece of execution technology, were similarly not limited to their most basic or etymological meanings, but referred to whatever forms of the instrument were in existence. The word “car” is derived from Latin *carrus* “chariot” and was used for hundreds of years to refer to a “horse-drawn carriage,” but hardly anyone today uses it to mean either!

The next three sections will demonstrate that that *σταυρος*, *ξυλον*, and *crux* meant far more than Watchtower writers have been willing to admit.

III. THE CASE OF *STAUROS*

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the semantic parameters of *σταυρος* incorporated only the meaning of “stake” in the Greek dialect used by the early Christians. The following statements gleaned from their publications document their view:

Stauros in both classical and *koine* Greek carries no thought of a “cross” made from two timbers. It means only an upright stake, pale, pile, or pole.⁸

The inspired writers of the Christian Greek scriptures wrote in the common (*koine*) Greek and used the word *stauros* to mean the same as in the classical Greek, namely, a stake or a pole, a single one without a crossbeam of any kind or at any angle. There is no proof to the contrary.⁹

In classical Greek, this word [*σταυρος*] meant merely an upright stake, or pale. Later it also came to be used for an execution stake having a crosspiece.¹⁰

Do these categorical statements accurately describe the whole range of meaning expressed by *σταυρος*?

The etymological meaning of *σταυρος* is something like “an object that stands firm.” The word derives from the Proto-Indo-European root **sta-* “to stand,” from which our English words “stand,” “stern,” and “stem” derive.¹¹ *Σταυρος* appears to have originally denoted a type of pointed stake used to build fences. Homer's *Odyssey* provides the earliest attestation of this word: “He had driven stakes [*σταυρους*] the whole length this way and that, huge stakes, set close together, which he had made by splitting an oak to the black core.”¹² A synonym of *σταυρος* which was used less frequently was *σκολοψ*.¹³

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Aid to Bible Understanding*, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1971), p. 824.

⁹ *New World Translation* (1950), p. 769.

¹⁰ *Reasoning From the Scriptures*, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1987), p. 89.

¹¹ Calvert Watkins, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), p. 64-65.

¹² *Odyssey* 14,11; translated by A. T. Murray, in the *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919).

Greek authors used *σταυρος* to denote an ordinary stake throughout the Classical (8th century-4th century B.C.) and Hellenistic (4th century B.C.-4th century A.D.) periods.¹⁴ At the same time, however, the semantic range of *σταυρος* underwent two significant expansions. The first took place during the Greco-Persian Wars (499-479 B.C.). These conflicts introduced the Greeks to the Persian mode of execution – that of nailing a criminal or prisoner to a stake. What distinguished this practice from impalement was that the victim was still alive when the nails were driven into him.¹⁵ “Crucifixion” is the term usually used by scholars today to describe it, regardless of the form of the apparatus. “It seems that the Persians invented or first used this mode of execution. They probably did so in order not to defile the earth, which was consecrated to Ormuzd, by the body of the person executed.”¹⁶

The Greeks naturally used *σταυρος* to refer to the instrument used by the Persians, even though there was significant variety in its shape.¹⁷ Later on, Alexander the Great and other Greek generals used the Persian *σταυρος*, and eventually it was adopted by the Phoenicians and Carthaginians.¹⁸

The second semantic expansion probably occurred around the second century B.C. or sometime thereafter. During the Punic Wars (264-146 B.C.), the Romans encountered the Phoenician version of crucifixion and swiftly appropriated it as a means of capital punishment for slaves. Straying away from the purpose the Persians intended it for, the Romans converted it into a brutal torture machine. This was accomplished by adding a second piece of wood called the *patibulum* to the execution stake, as well as a thorn-shaped *sedile* upon which the victim rested his weight.¹⁹ Prior to the invention of crucifixion, the Romans used the *patibulum* to humiliate condemned slaves marching to their execution. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (first century B.C.) described this ancient practice:

A Roman citizen of no obscure station, having ordered one of his slaves to be put to death, delivered him to his fellow-slaves to be led away, and in order that his punishment might be witnessed by all, directed them to drag him through the Forum and every other conspicuous part of the city as they whipped him, and that he should go ahead of the procession which the Romans were at the time conducting in honour of the god. The men ordered to lead the slave to his punishment, *having stretched out both hands and fastened them to a piece of wood which extended across his breast and shoulders as far as his wrists*, followed him, tearing his naked body with whips.²⁰

¹³ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, M.I.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985) Vol. 4, p. 573.

¹⁴ Xenophon's *Anabasis* 5,2,21; Thucydides 4,90,2; Plutarch *Artaxerxes* 17,7; Philo, *De Agricultura* 11; Josephus, *Jewish War* 5,469.

¹⁵ The nailing of a dead victim to a stake or tree was already a common practice in the Mediterranean region. See the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, p. 828 for further details.

¹⁶ Kittel and Friedrich, Vol. 4, p. 573.

¹⁷ Although the Bible describes it as single-beamed (Esther 7:9, 10), Herodotus stated that it as comprised of “boards” (*Historiarum* 9,120) and Plutarch shows that even four vertical stakes were used for a single victim (*Artaxerxes* 17,5). Apparently, the appearance of the apparatus did not matter to the Persians, as long as it performed its function.

¹⁸ Kittel and Friedrich, p. 573.

¹⁹ J. B. Torrance, *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. by J. D. Douglas, et. al., (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 279.

²⁰ *Roman Antiquities*, 7,69,1-2; translated by Earnest Cary, in the *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943)

Sometimes the *patibulum* was attached to a wagon so that the humiliated slave would be forced to behave like a beast of burden. Plutarch (A.D. 46-120) explains what this was like: “And it was a severe punishment for a slave who had committed a fault, if he was obliged to take up a piece of wood with which they prop up the pole of a wagon, and carry it around through the neighborhood.”²¹

The type of crucifixion most Christians believe Jesus underwent came into existence when Phoenician crucifixion was fused with the Roman *patibulum*-bearing punishment. Not only was the errant slave punished by being paraded throughout the city yoked to a *patibulum*, but he now died suspended from it. As we shall soon see, the writings of Plautus (254-184 B.C.) show that the *crux compacta* (double-beamed cross) was in existence long before the time of Jesus.²² The *crux simplex* (single-beamed cross) was still used, but mainly in the *ad hoc* mass executions that accompanied military campaigns.²³

If the *crux compacta* came into existence in the second century B.C., then an obvious question is: “When did *σταυρος* begin to denote such an instrument?” Interestingly, the Society has never answered this question affirmatively. Usually it has made vague statements like: “Later it also came to be used for an execution stake having a crosspiece.”²⁴ “. . .the original meanings of these words [*σταυρος* and *crux*] were later expanded to include the cross.”²⁵ Many Watchtower publications cite W. E. Vine's lexicon as stating that this occurred “by the middle of the 3rd cent. A.D.”²⁶ Additionally, the 22 March 1987 *Awake!* published an article by Nicholas Kip which implied that the meaning-shift took place in the days of Emperor Constantine (A.D. 312-337).²⁷

Therefore, the Society claims (albeit ambiguously) that the only meaning of *σταυρος* was “stake” until the beginning of the third century or so. Does the evidence support this view? Absolutely not! The Witnesses seem to be unaware of the testimony of Artemidorus Daldianus, a pagan soothsayer who flourished in the second century A.D. Sometime around A.D. 160, he wrote a dream interpretation manual named *Oneirocritica*. In one passage (2,53), Artemidorus remarked:

Being crucified is auspicious for all seafarers. For the *σταυρος*, like a ship, is made of wood and nails, and the ship's mast resembles a *σταυρος*.²⁸

²¹ *Coriolanus*, 24,4-5; translated by Bernadotte Perrin, in the *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950)

²² The evidence from Plautus will be examined in the section regarding the word *crux*.

²³ According to David Smith, *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ed. by James Hastings, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906), Vol. 1, p. 397: “sometimes the victim was fastened to it by his hands and feet, the former being extended above his head. Usually, however, it was a sharpened stake (*σκολοψ*), and the victim was impaled upon it. It passed through the length of his body, issuing from his mouth.”

²⁴ *Reasoning*, p. 89

²⁵ *Watchtower*, 15 February 1960, p. 127

²⁶ *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1968), pp. 142-143; *Awake!*, 8 May 1969, p. 4; *Aid*, p. 825; *Reasoning*, pp. 90-91 *Watchtower*, 15 August 1987, p. 22; *Watchtower*, 1 May 1989, pp. 23-24; see Vine's *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell Company, 1948), Vol. 1, p. 256.

²⁷ Kip states on p. 11: “It does mean ‘stake.’ I don't know how they ever got ‘cross’ out of *stauros*. But I'm not surprised. The Christian church has been doing things like that at least since Constantine's time.”

²⁸ *Σταυρουσθαι πασι μεν τοις ναυτιλλομενοις αγαθον και γαρ εκ ξυλων και ηλων γεγονεν ο σταυρος ως και το πλοιον, και η καταπτιος αυτου ομοια εστι σταυρω*. Translated by R. J. White, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, (Park Ridge, N.J.: Noyes Press, 1975).

A ship's mast consisted of a tall pole rising upward from the deck or keel intersected by the yard-arm. In fact, the Latin word for "yard-arm," namely *antenna*, was also used to denote the *patibulum*.²⁹ Rock carvings from that period show that a ship's mast did indeed resemble the traditional cross.³⁰

The satirist Lucian (A.D. 117-180) was even more explicit. In his humorous essay "Trial in the Court of Vowels," the Greek letter Tau (who had an awful reputation) was found guilty of murder:

Men weep and bewail their lot, and curse Cadmus with many curses for introducing Tau into the family of letters; they say it was his body that tyrants took for a model, his shape that they imitated, when they set up the erections on which men are crucified. *Σταυρος* the vile engine is called, and it derives its vile name from him. Now, with all these crimes upon him, does he not deserve death, nay, many deaths? For my part I know none bad enough but supplied by his own shape--that shape which he gave to the gibbet named *σταυρος* after him by men.³¹

But that was not all. Shortly after Lucian wrote his *Trial*, he composed the dialogue of *Prometheus on Caucasus*. Strangely, the Witnesses think that this writing supports their belief that *σταυρος* only meant "stake." The 1950 *New World Translation* states:

To such a stake or pale the person to be punished was fastened, just as when the popular Greek hero Prometheus was represented as tied to a stake or *stauros*. The Greek word which the dramatist Aeschylus used to describe this means to fasten or fix on a pole or stake, to impale, and the Greek author Lucian used *anastauroo* as a synonym for that word.³²

The 1984 revision even gave a specific citation:

It was to such a stake, or pale, that the person to be punished was fastened, just as the popular Greek hero Prometheus was represented as tied to rocks. Whereas the Greek word that the dramatist Aeschylus used to describe this simply means to tie or to fasten, the Greek author Lucian (*Prometheus*, I) used *anastauroo* as a synonym for that word.³³

Lucian did use *ανασταυρωω* the way the Witnesses say he did: "Suppose we crucify [*ανεσταυρωσθαι*] him half way up somewhere hereabouts over the ravine. . ." But the next phrase indicates what type of *σταυρος* Lucian had in mind: ". . .with his hands out-stretched from crag to crag."³⁴ In a later passage, Hermes tells Hephaestus and Prometheus: "Do you suppose there is not room on the Caucasus to peg out a couple of us? Come, your right hand! Clamp it down, Hephaestus, and in with the nails; bring down the hammer with a will. Now the left; make sure work of that too."³⁵ Instead of verifying

²⁹ *Aid*, p. 824.

³⁰ See the relief of a Roman ship from Sidon in Philip Carrington, *The Early Christian Church*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1957), Vol. 1, p. 129.

³¹ Lucian *Trial*, 12; translated by H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), Vol. 1.

³² p. 769.

³³ *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1984), p. 1577.

³⁴ *Prometheus*, I; translated by Fowler & Fowler, and A. M. Harmon, in the *Loeb Classical Library*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929).

³⁵ *Prometheus*, 2; translated by Fowler & Fowler.

the “torture stake” doctrine, Lucian's *Prometheus* demonstrates that *σταυρος* meant much more than just “stake” in 2nd-century Greek. The Watchtower Society is either dishonest or incredulously blind by misusing it to support its theory.

Earlier sources are less explicit on the shape of the *σταυρος*. I have found only two authors from the first century that allude to a double-beamed cross. Just as Lucian described the crucified Prometheus as having his limbs stretched out, so did Epictetus (a first-century A.D. philosopher) describe those being massaged as “stretched out like men who have been crucified.”³⁶ According to Josephus (A.D. 37-95), the Roman soldiers invading Jerusalem crucified the Jews “in different postures.”³⁷ Since only a single basic position is possible with a *crux simplex*, more elaborate crosses were likely used. Moreover, many Greek writers from this period (including the gospelists) described the Roman *patibulum*-bearing punishment that preceded crucifixion.³⁸

One simple fact demolishes the Society's linguistic argument – *σταυρος* was the only word used by the Greeks to refer to Roman crucifixions. If *σταυρος* did not denote the double-beamed cross in the first century, then what word did? The Greeks had to have had a word for the execution apparatus so widely used in the Roman world. But aside from *σταυρος*, there was no other word.

The semantic history of *σταυρος* is thus far more complicated than admitted by the Society. Documentary evidence shows that the word was used to denote a two-beamed cross before the days of Constantine, and in all likelihood during the times of Jesus and the apostles.³⁹ Evidently the Society did not research the matter further than their lexicons.

IV. THE CASE OF *XYLON*

Ξυλον is a word used by the Apostles Peter and Paul to refer to the *σταυρος* Jesus died upon (Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24). The Society argues that since the basic meaning of this word is “piece of wood” or “tree,” Jesus must have died on a mere stake. This view is nowhere more confusedly stated than in an article published in the 8 April 1963 *Awake!* The anonymous writer remarked:

Arguing in favor of this having been a simple stake or pole is the fact that both the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter speak of Jesus' having been put on a *xylon*, which simply means a piece of wood. . . . If Jesus had been fastened to a cross made up of two pieces of wood and so constructed into a form, would it be described as merely a piece of wood?⁴⁰

Again, the Society has artificially restricted the meaning of a word. The author assumes that *ξυλον* only means “piece of wood,” and therefore cannot apply to a two-beamed cross. This belief is then carried to its logical conclusion:

³⁶ *Epictetus* 3,26,22; translated by W.A. Oldfather, in the *Loeb Classical Library*, (London: William Heinemann, 1928), Vol. 2.

³⁷ *Jewish War*, 5,450-451; translated by J. Thackeray, in the *Loeb Classical Library*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928). It should be pointed out that Josephus was an eyewitness to these events.

³⁸ Their statements will be examined in the “Biblical Evidence” section of this article.

³⁹ Once the Society admitted that this was so: “. . . the term *stauros*, the only one used by the Gospel writers when referring to that upon which Jesus hung, could mean either a plain pole, a stake or a cross” (*Awake!*, 8 April 1963, p. 28). Compare the 22 November 1976 *Awake!*, p. 27.

⁴⁰ p. 28.

But a club is merely a piece of wood and so we find the Gospel writers repeatedly using *xylon* when referring to clubs or pieces of wood that the mob carried that came to take Jesus. . . . Certainly the mob that came to take Jesus did not come with crosses but with pieces of wood, clubs or staves, as *xylon* is variously translated in these instances.⁴¹

This line of reasoning again rests on the assumption that *ξύλον* was capable of only one meaning: If *ξύλον* referred to a “cross” in the case of Jesus' execution instrument, then the *ξύλον*s used by the mob would have also been “crosses.” Since this was not the case, *ξύλον* does not mean “cross.” Another example of bad logic can be found in the same article:

While the word *xylon* generally means a piece of wood, no longer living, it is at times used in the Scriptures to refer to figurative living trees. . . . There is a distinct word in Greek for tree, namely, *dendron*. From it comes the English word dendrology, the science or study of trees. *Dendron* occurs some twenty-five times in the Christian Greek Scriptures. . . . This word *dendron*, meaning a living tree, however, is never used in Scriptures to refer to the instrument of torture to which Jesus was fastened.⁴²

The reference to *δενδρον* is a conspicuous straw man. No one has ever claimed that this term meant either “cross” or “stake.” The whole discussion on *δενδρον* adds nothing to our understanding of *ξύλον*, yet the digression adds a scholarly flair to the article.

Interestingly, the portions quoted above indicate that the Society is aware that *ξύλον* meant much more than “piece of wood” – its semantic content also included the meanings of “club” and “tree.” Furthermore, the 1950 *New World Translation* appendix claimed (without citing any evidence) that a “special sense” of *ξύλον* is “an upright stake without a crossbeam.”⁴³ Despite all of this, the same 1963 article stated in its concluding paragraph that *ξύλον* “simply means a piece of wood and allows for no such twofold meaning!”⁴⁴ Contradictory statements such as these demonstrate that the Society has not really done any clear thinking on the matter.

Ξύλον was capable of many specific meanings. In Classical Greek, it was used to refer to “logs” or “timbers”⁴⁵ “trees,”⁴⁶ “benches,”⁴⁷ “wood market,”⁴⁸ and even a measurement of length.⁴⁹ But that was not all. This word eventually “took on the sense of something disgraceful or shameful.”⁵⁰ It came to denote a wide variety of instruments of punishment, including “pillory,”⁵¹ “stocks,”⁵² a combination of both,⁵³ and “club.”⁵⁴ Clearly the word meant more than just “a piece of wood”!

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ p. 769.

⁴⁴ *Awake!*, 8 April 1963, p. 28.

⁴⁵ *Iliad*, 8,507; Thucydides 7,25,2; Herodotus 1,186.

⁴⁶ Xenophon *An.*, 6,4-5.

⁴⁷ Demosthenes 1111,22; Aristophanes *Vespae*, 90; *Acharnenses*, 25.

⁴⁸ Aristophanes *Fragmenta*, 402-403.

⁴⁹ Hero *Geometrica* 23,4,11.

⁵⁰ Kittel and Friedrich, Vol. 3, p. 37.

⁵¹ Aristophanes *Nubes*, 592; *Lysistrata*, 680.

⁵² Herodotus 9,37; Aristophanes *Equites*, 367.

⁵³ Aristophanes *Eq.* 1049.

⁵⁴ Herodotus 2,63; 4,180; Plutarch *Lycurgus*, 30,2.

The semantic range of ξυλον in the New Testament varies little from Classical Greek. It was used to denote “wood materials” (1 Corinthians 3:12), “trees” (Revelation 22:19), “stocks” (Acts 16:24), and “clubs.” (Matthew 26:47) But the New Testament writers also employed it to refer to the apparatus used in Roman crucifixions. There were apparently two reasons for this.

In pre-Republican times, the Romans sometimes punished disobedient slaves by fastening them to barren trees and scourging them to death.⁵⁵ Occasionally the victims were forced to bear the *patibulum* before they were hung. This form of punishment was called *arbor infelix* or *infelix lignum*, and several later Latin writers confused it with crucifixion.⁵⁶ As a result, the two-beamed cross became known as an *arbor* or *lignum* (both Latin words mean “tree”).⁵⁷ This may have influenced the New Testament writers to use ξυλον to mean the same thing as σταυρος.

But there is a more likely explanation. Many scholars now believe that the characteristic use of ξυλον in the New Testament (and in several Jewish writings) arose from a common Jewish interpretation of Deuteronomy 21:22-23. That passage reads, in the *Jerusalem Bible*:

If a man guilty of a capital offence is put to death and you must hang him on a tree, his body must not remain on the tree overnight; you must bury him the same day, for one who has been hanged is accursed of God, and you must not defile the land that Yahweh your God gives you for an inheritance.

This scripture of course does not actually refer to crucifixion. But many Jewish writers found it relevant when the Romans introduced that form of execution into Judaea. Significantly, the Dead Sea Scrolls twice cited Deuteronomy 21:22-23 with reference to crucifixion.⁵⁸ Likewise, Paul applied that scripture (derived from the Septuagint) to the crucifixion of Jesus:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by being cursed for our sake, since the scripture says: “Cursed be everyone who is hanged on a tree [ξυλον].” This was done so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might include the pagans, and so that through faith we might receive the promised Spirit. (Galatians 3:13-14; *JB*)

Professor Max Wilcox believes that influence from Deuteronomy can be detected in each instance Peter and Paul use ξυλον to denote Jesus' execution instrument. Paul's discourse in Acts 13:28-30 may even be a midrash on Deuteronomy 21:22-23.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the Jews demanded Pilate to remove the bodies of Jesus and the thieves from their

⁵⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Crucifixion in Ancient Palestine, Qumrum Literature, and the New Testament,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 40 (1978), p. 509.

⁵⁶ Livy 1,26,10-11; Cicero *Pro Rabirio*, 4,13; Seneca *Epistle* 101,14.

⁵⁷ See especially Seneca, above.

⁵⁸ 11QT, column 64, lines 6-13; 4QpNah, fragments 3-4, column 1, lines 1-11. The latter citation described the crucifixion of Alexander Jannaeus in 88 B.C. Josephus referred to the same event in *Antiquities*, 13,14,2; *Jewish War*, 1,4,5-6. Detailed discussions of these texts are found in Fitzmyer, pp. 498-507; Yigael Yadin, “Peshet Nahum (4Q pNahum) Reconsidered,” *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 21, no. 1 (1971), pp. 1-12; Joseph M. Baumgarten, “Does *TLH* in the Temple Scroll Refer to Crucifixion,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 91 (1972), pp. 472-81.

⁵⁹ “‘Upon The Tree’ – Deut. 21:22-23 In The New Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 96 (1977), p. 92.

σταυροι on the day after they had been crucified since it was the Sabbath. (John 19:31) All of this indicates that the Jewish perception of Roman crucifixion revolved around Deuteronomy 21:22-23.

In either case, *ξύλον* became an acceptable synonym for *σταυρος* by many Greek-speaking Jews and Christians. Josephus used these two words interchangeably.⁶⁰ Philo of Alexandria (15 B.C.-A.D. 45) compared the “mind stripped of the creations of its art” with a headless corpse, “with severed neck nailed like the crucified to the tree [*ξύλω*] of helpless and poverty-stricken indiscipline.”⁶¹ The author of the Epistle of Barnabas (late first century or early second century A.D.) described the two-beamed *σταυρος* as a *ξύλον*. (Barnabas 8:5; 12:1, 7) When we consider the broader context of *ξύλον*, we realize that it definitely does not just mean “a piece of wood.” It often denoted exactly the same thing *σταυρος* denoted: the instrument used in Roman crucifixion, composed of either one or two beams.

V. THE CASE OF *CRUX*

The Witnesses acknowledge that this word means the same thing as *σταυρος*, but claim that “stake” is the only proper definition. The following quotation from the 15 August 1987 *Watchtower* goes so far as to state that “many” Christians and scholars have been misled by the similarity between the word *crux* and the English “cross”:

True, the Romans did use an instrument of execution known in Latin as the *crux*. And in translating the Bible into Latin, this word *crux* was used as a rendering of *stauros*. Because the Latin word *crux* and the English word *cross* are similar, many mistakenly assume that *crux* was necessarily a stake with a crossbeam.⁶²

Interestingly, the article goes on to state that *crux* was necessarily a stake without a crossbeam. Is *this* a mistaken assumption?

It all depends on when *crux* began to denote the two-beamed cross. If the shift in meaning occurred before the New Testament was composed or at the latest before it was translated into Latin, then the Society's position is specious. When does the Society believe the meaning of *crux* shifted to “cross?” Although it has never published (as with *σταυρος*) any official statements on the matter, it has twice indicated that the semantic change occurred after the first century A.D. The 1963 publication “*All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial*” quoted Tacitus (c. A.D. 56-c. 120) as saying that Roman Christians were martyred on flaming “crosses” during the A.D. 64 persecution.⁶³ Twenty-five years later, the Society cited the same passage in *Revelation – Its Grand Climax at Hand*. But this time it replaced the word “crosses” with “[stakes],” and referred the reader in a footnote to a discussion of the “torture stake” doctrine in the 1984 *New World Translation* appendix.⁶⁴ Apparently the Society believes that *crux* still meant “stake” in the second century A.D., when Tacitus composed his *Annals*.

⁶⁰ *Antiquities*, 11,246-261.

⁶¹ *De Somniis*, 2,213; translated by F. H. Colson & G. H. Whitaker, in the *Loeb Classical Library*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934).

⁶² p. 23.

⁶³ “*All Scripture Is Inspired Of God and Beneficial*,” (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1963), p. 235. See Tacitus *Annals*, 15,44.

⁶⁴ *Revelation – Its Grand Climax at Hand*, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1988), p. 101.

The Watchtower exegetes also falsely claim that *crux* meant only “stake” in the days of the Roman historian Livy (59 B.C.-A.D. 17). We read in the 1950 *New World Translation* appendix:

The fact that *stauros* is translated *crux* in the Latin versions furnishes no argument against [the “torture stake” doctrine]. . . A cross is only a later meaning of *crux*. Even in the writings of Livy, a Roman historian of the first century B.C.E., *crux* means a mere stake.⁶⁵

The 22 June 1984 *Awake!* likewise remarked: “The Latin word used for the instrument on which Christ died was *crux* which, according to Livy, a famous Roman historian of the first century C.E., means a mere stake.”⁶⁶ Finally, the version of the *New World Translation* published in that same year stated: “In the writings of Livy, a Roman historian of the first century B.C.E., *crux* means a mere stake. ‘Cross’ is only a later meaning of *crux*.”⁶⁷

This claim however does not stand up to critical scrutiny. For one thing, the Society fails to properly document its statement with references to Livy's writings. A careful examination of Livy's writings shows the historian never used *crux* the way the Society says he did. According to Packard's *Concordance to Livy*, the word *crux* in its various inflected forms appeared six times in Livy's writings.⁶⁸ These are quoted below with their contexts:⁶⁹

- (1) “Whereupon he scouraged the guide, and, to terrify others, crucified [*crucem sublato*] him, and going into the camp behind the entrenchments, dispatched Maharbal with the cavalry.” (22,13,9)
- (2) “Five and twenty slaves were crucified [*crucem acti*], on the charge of having conspired in the Campus Martius.” (22,33,2)
- (3) “He thereupon . . . ordered them [high-ranking officials] to be scouraged and crucified [*cruci adfigi*]. Then he crossed over to his ships to the island of Pityusa.” (28,37,3)
- (4) “The deserters were severely treated than the runaway slaves, Latin citizens being beheaded, Romans crucified [*crucem sublati*].” (30,43,13)
- (5) “Some, who had been the instigators of the revolt, he scouraged and crucified [*crucibus adfixit*], others he turned over to their masters.” (33,36,3)
- (6) “In this I for my part should trust my own cause even if I were pleading, not before the Roman, but before the Carthaginian senate, where commanders are said to be crucified [*crucem tolli*] if they have conducted a campaign with successful but defective policy.” (38,48,13)

The Society is guilty of misrepresenting the facts again. Livy never employed the word *crux* to exclusively denote impalement. None of the six excerpts reveal any information indicating what the nature of the *crux* was like. When Livy did refer to the *crux simplex*,

⁶⁵ P. 770.

⁶⁶ P. 17.

⁶⁷ P. 1577

⁶⁸ David W. Packard, *A Concordance to Livy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 1011.

⁶⁹ Translated by B. O. Foster, et al., in the *Loeb Classical Library* (New York, N.Y.: Putnam, 1919-58).

he used the word *palus*: “Bound to a stake [*deligati ad palum*] they were scourged and beheaded.”⁷⁰ Unless the Watchtower scholars publish a citation indicating where they believe to have found this evidence, their claim must be dismissed as false.

The evidence cited in support of a late shift in the meaning of *crux* is thus highly dubious. Indeed, the Society has overlooked a veritable *mountain* of evidence disproving their claim on every ground. The following citations from Plautus, Seneca, and Tacitus, who wrote either before or at the same time as the Apostles, show clearly that (1) the *crux* included a *patibulum* or *furca* (both meaning “crossbeam”), (2) the *patibulum* was nailed to the *stipes* (the upright stake), (3) the victims carried the *patibulum* in advance of their crucifixion, and (4) the victims “stretched out” their arms on the *crux*.

Plautus (254-184 B.C.)

- (1) *Frateor, manus vobis do. Et post dabis sub furcis. Abi intro--in cruce.*
I admit it, I hold up my hands! And later you will hold them up on a *furca*. Do go along in for crucifixion!⁷¹
- (2) *Credo ego istoc extemplo tibi esse eundum actutum extra portam, dispessis manibus, patibulum quom habebis.*
I suspect you're doomed to die outside the gate, in that position: Hands spread out and nailed to the *patibulum*.⁷²
- (3) *O carnuficium cribum, quod credo fore, ita te forabunt patibulatum per vias stimulis carnufices, si huc reveniat senex.*
Oh, I bet the hangmen will have you looking like a human sieve, the way they'll prod you full of holes as they run you down the streets with your arms on a *patibulum*, once the old man gets back!⁷³
- (4) *Ego dabo ei talentum, primus qui in cruce excucurrerit; sed ea lege, ut offigantur bis pedes, bis brachia.*
I'll give two hundred pounds to the first man to charge my *crux* and take it – on condition his legs and arms are double-nailed, that is.⁷⁴
- (5) *Patibulum ferat per urbem, deinde adfigatur cruci.*
I shall bear the *patibulum* through the city; afterwards I shall be nailed to the *crux*.⁷⁵

Seneca (c. 4 B.C.-A.D. 65)

- (6) *Cum refigere se crucibus conentur, in quas unusquisque vestrum clavos suos ipse adigit, ad supplicium tamen acti stipitibus singulis pendent; hi, qui in se ipsi animum advertunt, quot cupiditatibus tot crucibus distrahuntur. At maledici et in alienam contumeliam venusti sunt. Crederem illis hoc vacare, nisi quidam ex patibulo suo spectatores conspuerent!*

Though they strive to release themselves from their crosses---those crosses to which each one of you nails himself with his own hand--yet they, when brought to punishment hang

⁷⁰ Livy 28,29,11; translated by Foster. Also note 26,13,15: “So that I may breathe my last in prison, or else, bound to a stake [*ad palum deligatus*].”

⁷¹ *Persa*, 295; translated by Paul Nixon, in the *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).

⁷² *Miles Gloriosus*, 359-360; translated by Peter L. Smith, *Plautus: Three Comedies*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

⁷³ *Mostellaria*, 55-57; translated by Nixon.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 359-360.

⁷⁵ *Carbonaria*, fragment 2; George Goetz & Friedrich Schoell, *T. Macci Plauti Comoediae*, (Leipzig: Verlag von B. G. Teuber, 1901), Vol. 7, p. 141; H. T. Riley, *The Comedies of Plautus* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1894-1906).

each one on a single *stipes*; but these others who bring upon themselves their own punishment are stretched upon as many crosses as they had desires. Yet they are slanderous and witty in heaping insult on others. I might believe that they were free to do so, did not some of them spit upon spectators from their own *patibulum*!⁷⁶

(7) . . . *alium in cruce membra distendere*

. . . another to have his limbs stretched upon the *crux*.⁷⁷

(8) *Video istic cruces non unius quidem generis sed aliter ab aliis fabricatas: capite quidam conversos in terram suspendere, alii per obscena stipitem egerunt, alii brachia patibulo explicuerunt.*

Yonder I see crosses, not indeed of a single kind, but differently contrived by different peoples; some hang their victims with head toward the ground, some impale their private parts, others stretch out their arms on a *patibulum*.⁷⁸

(9) *Contempissimum putarem, si vivere vellet usque ad crucem. . . Est tanti vulnus suum premere et patibulo pendere districtum. . . Invenitur, qui velit adactus ad illud infelix lignum, iam debilis, iam pravus et in foedum scapularum ac pectoris tuber elisus, cui multae moriendi causae etiam citra crucem fuerant, trahere animam tot tormenta tracturam?*

I should deem him most despicable had he wished to live up to the very time of crucifixion. . . Is it worth while to weigh down upon one's own wound, and hang impaled upon a *patibulum*? . . . Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly tumours on chest and shoulders, and draw the breath of life amid long drawn-out agony? I think he would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the *crux*!⁷⁹

(10) *Cogita hoc loco carcerem et cruces et eculeos et unicum et adactum per medium hominem, qui per os emerget, stipitem.*

Picture to yourself under this head the prison, the *crux*, the rack, the hook, and the stake which they drive straight through a man until it protrudes from his throat.⁸⁰

(11) . . . *sive extendendae per patibulum manus. . .*

. . . or his hands to be extended on a *patibulum*.⁸¹

Tacitus (c. A.D. 56-c. 120)

(12) *Solacio fuit servus Verginii Capitonis, quem proditorem Tarracinensium diximus, patibulo adfixus in isdem anulis quos acceptos a Vitellio gestabat.*

The Tarracines, however, found comfort in the fact that the slave of Verginius Capito, who had betrayed them, was crucified [*patibulo adfixus*] wearing the very rings that he had received from Vitellius.⁸²

⁷⁶ *De Vita Beata*, 19,3; translated by John W. Basore, in the *Loeb Classical Library* (London: William Heinemann, 1932).

⁷⁷ *De Ira*, 1,2,2; translated by Basore.

⁷⁸ *De Consolatione*, 20,3; translated by Basore.

⁷⁹ *Epistle 101,10-14*; translated by R. M. Gummere, in the *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943).

⁸⁰ *Epistle 14,5*; translated by Gummere.

⁸¹ *Fragmenta*, 124; quoted by Lactantius, *Divinis Institutionibus*, 6,17; translated by M. F. McDonald, in the *Fathers of the Church Library*, Vol. 49, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1964).

⁸² *Histories*, 4,3; translated by Clifford H. Moore, in the *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

(13) *Rapti qui tributo aderant milites et patibulo adfixi.*
The soldiers stationed to supervise the tribute were seized and nailed to the *patibulum*.⁸³

(14) *...sed caedes patibula ignes cruces, tamquam reddituri . . .*
He was hasty with slaughter and the *patibulum*, with arson and the *crux*.⁸⁴

In light of the foregoing excerpts, it is simply absurd to claim that *crux* meant only “stake” in the first and second centuries A.D., when Livy and Tacitus flourished. The testimony of Seneca is most important, since he was a contemporary of Jesus and the apostles. He was also Emperor Nero's personal tutor and advisor, and as such must have been greatly familiar with matters of governmental policy.⁸⁵ The testimony of Tacitus shows that it is erroneous to reject “cross” as a valid translation of *crux* in his writings.

Evidence is therefore completely lacking that the meaning of *crux* was restricted to “stake,” as claimed by the Watchtower Society. Once the Society did blunder into admitting that *crux* and *σταυρος* denoted two-beamed crosses. The 22 November 1976 *Awake!* stated:

It is true that on occasion these terms were used to refer to cross-shaped objects. In these cases, however, the contexts of accounts employing these words describe crosses. But that is not the basic meaning of either Greek *stauros* or the Latin *crux*.⁸⁶

This is a curious admission. Not only does it acknowledge that these words often denoted crosses and cruciform objects, but it reveals why it is erroneous to adhere to the “basic meaning” of these words at all costs.

We may thus safely recognize that *σταυρος*, *ξύλον*, and *crux* referred to double-beamed crosses in the first century. The linguistic basis of the “torture stake” doctrine is therefore spurious. However this does not mean that Jesus *did* die on the cross. So far, we can only assert that *nothing disproves this view*. Semantic evidence alone cannot determine whether Jesus' execution instrument was composed of one or two beams. We must examine biblical and patristic evidence to figure out which one was most likely to have been used.

VI. BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

The foregoing discussion relates only *indirectly* the crucifixion of Jesus. We must now turn to direct evidence. Details contained within the gospel accounts of the Passion and Resurrection suggest that a *crux compacta* (double-beamed cross) was indeed used in the case of Jesus of Nazareth.

(a) John 19:17

According to the *New American Bible*, this scripture reads:

“Jesus was led away, and carrying the *σταυρος* by himself, went out to what is called the Place of the Skull.”

⁸³ *Annals*, 4,72; translated by John Jackson, in the *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

⁸⁴ *Annals*, 14,33; translated by Jackson.

⁸⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaeedia* (15th edition: 1989), Volume 10, p. 632-633.

⁸⁶ p. 27.

Most Witnesses never seem to note the significance of this verse and other references in the New Testament to *σταυρος*-bearing. As explained before, the Romans made their slaves and criminals carry the *patibulum* before crucifixion. The Greeks likewise mentioned this practice, but regularly used the word *σταυρος* to denote the *patibulum*. For instance, Plutarch stated in his *Moralia*: “Every criminal who goes to execution must carry his own *σταυρος* on his back.”⁸⁷ After describing the *σταυρος* as containing a crosspiece, Artemidorus also remarked: “For the *σταυρος* is like death and the man who is to be nailed carries it beforehand.”⁸⁸ Finally, Chariton (mid-second century A.D.) wrote: “Accordingly they were led out, chained together at the feet and neck, and each one carried his own *σταυρος*.”⁸⁹ Undoubtedly, these quotations refer to the same practice described in citations (1), (3), and (5) from the previous section.

The Society underestimates the weight this scripture has upon the issue. Seldom do any of the discussions published in Watchtower literature even mention it. The torture-stake doctrine forces them to believe that Jesus carried a *pole* to Golgotha.⁹⁰ Needless to say, this theory lacks any independent support. No Classical or ecclesiastical writer of antiquity ever stated that the condemned man carried a *stipes* without a crossbeam. Nevertheless, the idea that Jesus had in fact carried a *patibulum* is ruled out *a priori* by the torture stake doctrine. One of their only statements on the matter is found in the *Aid* book:

Tradition, not the Scriptures, also says that the condemned man carried only the crossbeam of the cross, called the *patibulum* or *antenna*, instead of both parts. In this way some avoid the predicament of having too much weight for one man to drag or carry a third of a mile (.5 kilometer) from the Castle of Antonia to Golgotha.⁹¹

This quotation completely misrepresents the facts. Religious tradition has nothing to do with what we know about *patibulum*-bearing punishment. This knowledge comes primarily from *pagan* Classical writings. By identifying its source as “tradition” (commonly regarded as the source of Christendom’s false doctrines),⁹² the author has cast considerable doubt on its veracity. What is more, Christian artists have traditionally pictured Jesus as carrying the whole cross – usually bearing it at an angle upon one of his shoulders.⁹³ In light of the evidence provided by Plautus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, it is quite preposterous to claim that the belief of Jesus carrying just the *patibulum* rests on

⁸⁷ *Εκαστος κακουργων εκφερει τον αυτου σταυρον*. Plutarch, *De Sera Numinis Vindicta*, 9; translated by Frank Cole Babbitt, in the *Loeb Classical Library*, (New York: Putnam, 1927).

⁸⁸ *ο μελλων σταυρωσ προσηλουσθαι προτερον αυτον βασταζει*: Artemidorus *Oneirocritica*, 2,56; translated by White.

⁸⁹ *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, 4; translated by Warren E. Blake, (Ann Arbor: Univeristy of Michigan Press, 1939).

⁹⁰ The Society has never said this explicitly. But it is the only interpretation possible. The new book *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1991) contains an illustration depicting Simon of Cyrene carrying the stake on his right shoulder, lumberjack-style (chapter 124). Compare with the 1 December 1977 *Watchtower*, p. 719.

⁹¹ P. 824.

⁹² The same book discussed the word “tradition,” and stated that some traditions “were in error or were followed or viewed in a way that made them harmful and objectionable.” (*Aid*, p. 1610).

⁹³ See Yves Christe, et al., *Art of the Christian World A.D. 200-1500: A Handbook of Styles and Forms*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1982), pp. 51, 482. The earliest representation extant is from c. A.D. 430.

the grounds that the pole was too heavy to bear. Since “cross-bearing” was never represented by Classical writers as involving only a *stipes* (single pole), we may safely conclude that Jesus' *σταυρος* included a crosspiece.

(b) Matthew 27:37

This text is widely recognized as suggestive of the two-beamed cross. The other three gospels mention the *titulus* (a piece of wood nailed to the *σταυρος* stating the victim's crime), but do not precisely describe *where* it was placed on Jesus' *σταυρος*. John 19:19 remarks that the *titulus* was nailed “on the *σταυρος*,” Luke 23:38 says that it hung “over him [Jesus].” Mark did not even mention that it was put on the *σταυρος*. But Matthew reported the italicized detail quoted below:

“Above his head they had put the charge against him in writing: ‘THIS IS JESUS, KING OF THE JEWS.’” (*NAB*)

If Jesus were impaled on a mere *crux simplex*, the *titulus* would have been placed above his hands. J. H. Bernard observes that this statement in Matthew “suggests that the cross was of the shape called *crux immissa*, with a cross-bar for the arms, as painters have generally represented it to be.”⁹⁴ Similarly, the book *The Execution of Jesus* commented: “There is no definite evidence about the shape of Jesus' cross, but it was probably a vertical stake and a crossbeam. This is indicated by the placing of the *titulus* over the head of Jesus, evidently along the crosspiece.”⁹⁵ The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* makes the same observation: “The form usually seen in pictures, the *crux immissa* (Latin cross †), is that in which the upright beam projects above the shorter crosspiece. From the mention of an inscription nailed above the head of Jesus, it may safely be inferred that this was the form of cross on which He died.”⁹⁶

(c) John 20:25

Another relevant text is the famous remark made by Apostle Thomas after the Resurrection to his fellow apostles:

“Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails [*ηλων*], and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.” (*Revised Standard Version*)

The plural “nails” indicates that two nails were involved, whereas only one nail would have been used if Jesus died upon a simple stake. Watchtower illustrations depict a single nail piercing through his hands.⁹⁷ What does the Society think of this scripture? Predictably, it is dismissed as “an insignificant detail.”⁹⁸ It is interesting to see how it is handled in a 1984 *Watchtower* “Questions From Readers” article:

⁹⁴ Bernard, *A Critical & Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), Vol. 2, p. 628.

⁹⁵ William R. Wilson, *The Execution of Jesus*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), p. 167.

⁹⁶ Vol. 1, p. 826.

⁹⁷ See the 15 August 1987 *Watchtower*, p. 24.

⁹⁸ 1 April 1984 *Watchtower*, p. 31.

Some have concluded from John 20:25 that two nails were used, one through each hand. But does Thomas' use of the plural (nails) have to be understood as a precise description indicating that each of Jesus' hands was pierced by a separate nail?

In Luke 24:39 the resurrected Jesus said: "See my hands *and my feet*, that it is I myself." This suggests that Christ's feet also were nailed. Since Thomas made no mention of nailprints in Jesus' feet, his use of the plural "nails" could have been a general reference to multiple nails used in impaling Jesus.

Thus, it is just not possible at this point to state with certainty how many nails were used.⁹⁹

In other words, the plural "nails" refers to the prints in Jesus' hands *and* feet. This view is not entirely lacking in substance, but several objections can be raised. First of all, there is nothing in the context of John 20:25 to support the Society's interpretation. This scripture does not mention the feet, nor are they even implied. Thomas was only talking about nails used to pierce the hands. Similarly, John 20:20 says that Jesus showed his disciples "his hands and his side," but not his feet.¹⁰⁰ It should also be pointed out that Luke 24:39 mentioned nothing about the actual nails. Hence, there is no *a priori* reason to read into the context of John 20:25 a reference to the nail(s) used to pierce the feet.¹⁰¹

The earliest noncanonical account of the Crucifixion, that of Pseudo-Peter (early second century A.D.), also indicates that more than one nail was used to pierce his hands: "And then the Jews drew the *nails* from the hands of the Lord and laid him on the earth."¹⁰² Later ecclesiastical writers mentioned the "the marks of the nails," but did not specifically indicate whether they were found on the feet.¹⁰³

(d) John 21:18, 19

Crucifixion was frequently described in antiquity as "stretching out the hands." We have already seen that this phrase was used by Greek writers such as Lucian and Epictetus¹⁰⁴ and Latin writers such as Plautus and Seneca (= *dispessis manibus*)¹⁰⁵ to denote Roman crucifixion. According to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus himself may have used this phrase similarly:

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Bernard notes (pp. 674, 682): "Both Lk. and Jn. agree that His *hands* were marked, and Jn. speaks of "the print of the nails" in them (v. 25); but Jn. says nothing of the feet having been nailed." "As has been pointed out on v. 20, no mention is made of any nailing of the *feet*."

¹⁰¹ Although still maintaining the position taken in this article, the Society has more recently admitted that Thomas "could have meant a nail through each hand" (15 August 1987 *Watchtower*, p. 29).

¹⁰² Gospel of Peter 6:21; translated by Wilhelm Schneemelcher into German in his *New Testament Apocrypha*, English edition edited by R. M. Wilson, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), Vol. 1, p. 185.

¹⁰³ See Irenaeus *Adversus Haereses*, 5,31,2.

¹⁰⁴ Also note Artemidorus *Oneirocritica*, 1,76: *κακουπτος δε ων σταυρωθησεται δια το υψος και την των χειρων εκτασιν*, "If he is a criminal, he will be crucified because of the height and outstretched position of the hands," translated by White; Josephus *Antiquities* 19,94 and the comments of many early Church Fathers regarding the death of Jesus (presented in the next section).

¹⁰⁵ See also Plautus, *Pseudolus*, 839-842.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you grow old, *you will stretch out your hands* [*εκτενεις τας χειρας σου*], and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go.” (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.) And after this he said to him, “Follow me.” (RS)

There appear to be three main interpretations of these verses. Some feel that verse 19 was added to the text of the Fourth Gospel by an anonymous redactor. In its original context the quotation “merely fortells in figurative language the helplessness of old age,” but the redactor “in the glowing tradition of Peter's martyrdom” twisted the words to mean crucifixion.¹⁰⁶ There is little textual evidence supporting this view, yet even if it were true the interpolated remark would show that the phrase “stretch out the hands” was understood by early Christians as referring to crucifixion.¹⁰⁷

A second interpretation, favored by those who view the text as original, regards the phrase as a reference to Peter's crucifixion and nothing else. But this view is also inadequate. Bernard points out that the Greek word meaning “girding” (=ζωνυμι) from verse 18 was generally used in the Septuagint and Classical Greek writings to describe the girding of *clothes* or *armor*; this word was never used “in the sense of *binding* a criminal, which must be supposed to be the meaning of *αλλος ζωσει σε* if the Lord's words are taken as predicative of Peter's martyrdom.”¹⁰⁸ Another difficulty is the use of *εκτενεις* instead of *εκτασις* in this scripture. Whereas the latter word clearly denoted “an extension to the side,” the former usually indicated “a forward extension of the arms,” as in Luke 5:13: “And he stretched out his hand, and touched him.” (RS) The occurrence of *ζωνυμι* and *εκτενεις* in John 21:18 conjures up the image of a helpless old man needing the assistance of an attendant to gird (*ζωνυμι*) him with clothes as he stretches (*εκτενεις*) his hands forward.¹⁰⁹

But the most convincing evidence that this text refers to something other than crucifixion is the order of events. D. W. O'Connor states: “If there were a reference here to crucifixion, would one not expect that the ‘girding’ would be mentioned first, followed by the ‘carrying,’ and lastly by the extension of the arms?”¹¹⁰

A third interpretation combines the best elements of the previous two. As suggested by Bultmann and other scholars, “the text of John 21:18 may reflect an ancient proverb: In youth man goes free where he wishes, in old age he must allow himself to be led even when he does not wish.”¹¹¹ This proverb was adapted by either Jesus or John to refer to Peter's crucifixion, as Barnabas Lindars explains: “He has put it into the second person and altered the tenses of the verbs from timeless present to past and future. He has also expanded it with symbolic detail. . . .The language is carefully chosen to preserve the picture of the helplessness of an old man.”¹¹² This explains why *ζωνυμι* and *εκτενεις*

¹⁰⁶ Walter W. Hyde, *Paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1946), p. 269.

¹⁰⁷ Bernard (p. 709) argues convincingly that v. 18 is Johannine: “for, if he [the redactor] desired to place sentences of his own making in the mouth of Jesus, which should contain a prophecy of Peter's crucifixion, he would have phrased them with less ambiguity.”

¹⁰⁸ Bernard, p. 708.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel W. O'Connor, *Peter in Rome: The Literary, Liturgical, and Archaeological Evidence*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 62.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Lindars, *The Gospel of John: Based on the Revised Standard Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 636-637.

were used instead of semantically appropriate words and why the order of events appears jumbled. Lindars on the other hand advances an ingenious explanation of the ordering of events: “The sequence intended may be (a) stretching out the arms along the cross-beam, (b) having the arms tied to it with ropes, and (c) being hauled up on to the stake.”¹¹³

A slightly different view, recognizing two strata of meaning in the prophecy, is provided by G. H. C. MacGregor: “The language suggests the feebleness of an old man who must be tended by another and have the whole of life ordered for him irrespective of his own desires. But in the words ‘stretch out your hands’ there is a deeper reference to the stretching out of the victim’s arms as the executioner straps him to the cross.”¹¹⁴

Since the Fourth Gospel was completed around the close of the first century,¹¹⁵ its author must have known the true fate of Apostle Peter. Sources contemporary with it, such as 1 Clement (A.D. 98) and Ascension of Isaiah (late first century A.D.), indicate that Peter was martyred during the Neronian persecution of A.D. 64.¹¹⁶ Tacitus explained how numerous Christians were executed at that time: “They were fastened on crosses [*crucibus adfixi*], and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night.”¹¹⁷ Was Peter on one of those crosses? Christian writers from the late second century A.D. onward reported unanimously that Peter was crucified “like his Master” in Rome.¹¹⁸ If this tradition is correct, then John must have been alluding to crucifixion in verse 19.

How the Witnesses view John 21:18, 19? Their only discussion of this text was published in the 15 December 1971 *Watchtower*. In the “Questions From Readers” section, they present the following argument:

The ancient religious historian Eusebius reports that Peter “was crucified with his head downward, having requested of himself to suffer in this way.” However, Jesus’ prophecy was not that specific. Acknowledges *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*: “As the extension of hands is set before girding and being led away, it is difficult to discern how it must be conceived. If the order is part of the prophecy, we must suppose the prisoner lashed to the *patibulum* before being girded and led out to execution.”

So, were it not for the tradition recorded by Eusebius, Jesus’ statement in itself would not point to death by crucifixion or impalement. Viewing the words of John 21:18, 19 apart from tradition, we would come to the following conclusion: In his younger years Peter was able to gird himself at will for whatever duty he wanted to perform. He had the liberty to go where he wanted to go. But in later life this would change. He would have to stretch out his hands, perhaps in submission to someone else. Another man would take control of him, girding Peter (either binding him or preparing him for what was to come) and bearing him to a place where he did not want to go, evidently the place of execution. Thus Jesus’ prophecy regarding Peter indeed indicated that the apostle would die a martyr’s death; but the *manner* is not necessarily implied.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ MacGregor, *The Gospel of John*, (Garden City: N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1929), p. 375.

¹¹⁵ This date is accepted by both Bible critics and Jehovah’s Witnesses. For a divergent opinion, see John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 254-311.

¹¹⁶ 1 Clement 5:3-4; Ascension of Isaiah 4:2,3. For a detailed discussion of the texts, see O’Connor, pp. 68-86.

¹¹⁷ Tacitus *Annals*, 15,44; translated by Jackson.

¹¹⁸ Tertullian *De praescriptione haereticorum* 36,12; *Scorpiace*, 20; *Adversum Marcion* 4,5; Lactantius *De mortibus persecutorum*, 2; Origen *Commentary on Genesis*, 3; Eusebius *De theophania*, 5,31; *Ecclesiastical History*, 2,25,5. From Origen onward, Peter was thought to have been crucified upside-down.

¹¹⁹ P. 768.

This discussion is rather biased. The worst aspect of it is the selective use made of the *Catholic Commentary*. The Watchtower author concluded from it that “Jesus' statement in itself would not point to death by crucifixion or impalement.” But that is not what is implied in the book. Examine the entire context of the article's quotation from the *Catholic Commentary*:

The words have some of the mysterious obscurity of prophecy. Against the liberty of Peter's younger days (girding *himself* and walking where he pleased) is set this mysterious future event of his old age. If the counterpart contains only two terms, namely, girding by another, as an old man is helped to dress himself, and being led to a place not naturally desired (a place of execution), the prophecy envisages a violent death only, not the mode of death by crucifixion. The extension of the hands must therefore be the term specifically corresponding to crucifixion, but as the extension of the hands is set before girding and being led away, it is difficult to discern how it must be conceived. If the order is part of the prophecy, we must suppose the prisoner lashed to the *patibulum* before being girded and led out to execution. J[oh]n writing after Peter's death notes that Jesus said this ‘signifying by what death he should glorify God.’¹²⁰

Clearly, the editors of the *Catholic Commentary* believed that the phrase “stretch out the hands” in this instance referred to crucifixion. The portion quoted by the Watchtower writer was taken out of context since the issue being addressed was that of the sequence of events, not whether crucifixion was meant by the prophecy.

The Watchtower writer also rejects Eusebius' testimony for no apparent reason, and offered an alternative interpretation of John 21:18. It is also falsely implied (in the phrase “. . . were it not for the tradition recorded by Eusebius. . .”) that only Eusebius reported the tradition of Peter's crucifixion.

The Society's interpretation of John 21:18 ignores not only Eusebius' testimony, but more importantly the widely attested usage of *εκτενεις τας χειρας* in both Classical and patristic literature. A detailed examination of the literary evidence fails to uncover any instance this phrase was used to mean *submission* at execution. In fact every time Greek writers spoke of a “stretching out of the hands” at execution, it generally denoted crucifixion. Hence, the concluding remark at the close of this article is unwarranted: “Jesus' prophecy regarding Peter indeed indicated that the apostle would die a martyr's death; but the *manner* of this death is not necessarily implied.”¹²¹

The gospels thus paint a clear picture of Jesus' crucifixion, that of Jesus stretching out his arms onto a *patibulum* (as later imitated by Peter), each hand nailed to it with a separate nail, carrying it up to Golgotha, and finally being lifted up onto the stake with the *titulus* placed directly over his head. John 19:17 alone demonstrates that the *σταυρος* contained a crosspiece.

Writings from other early Christians stated explicitly that Jesus' cross was a *crux compacta*, as the next section will detail.

¹²⁰ Bernard Orchard, ed., *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, (New York: T. Nelson, 1953), p. 1017.

¹²¹ The Society has very recently contradicted this conclusion. In *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived* (ch. 130), the following question is asked: “How did Jesus indicate the manner in which Peter will die?” The answer, provided on the same page, certainly suggests that crucifixion (or impalement) was meant: “Just as Jesus was bound and executed because he did the work that God commissioned him to do, so, he now reveals, Peter will suffer a similar experience.”

VII. PATRISTIC EVIDENCE

Further evidence showing that Jesus was not crucified on a *crux simplex* is the consistent, unbroken chain of testimony of the early Church Fathers and a mixed assortment of other Christian authors. Both orthodox *and* heterodox (so-called “heretical”) writers from the late first century A.D. onward claimed that Jesus ended his earthly life nailed to a two-beamed cross. Listed below is an incomplete sampling of the relevant texts from the early Church up until the fifth century:

Pseudo-Barnabas (either wrote in A.D. 70-79 or c. 130)

- (1) Learn fully then, children of love, concerning all things, for Abraham, who first circumcised, did so looking forward in the spirit to Jesus, and had received the doctrines of three letters. For it [Genesis 14:14; 17:23] says, “And Abraham circumcised from his household eighteen men and three hundred.” [in Greek, ΤΙΗ] What, then was the knowledge that was given to him? Notice that he first mentions the eighteen, and after a pause the three hundred. The eighteen is I (=10) and H (=8) – you have Jesus [IH are the first two letters of ΙΗΣΟΥΣ, “Jesus”] – and because the cross [ὁ σταυρός] was destined to have grace in the T (=300) he says “and three hundred.” So he indicates Jesus in the two letters and the cross [τον σταυρον] in the other. (Barnabas 9:7-8)¹²²
- (2) Similarly, again, he [the Spirit] describes the cross [του σταυρου] in . . . Moses [Exodus 17:8-12], when Israel was warred upon by strangers, and in order to remind those who were warred upon that they were delivered unto death by reason of their sins--the Spirit speaks to the heart of Moses to make a representation of the cross [τυπον σταυρου], and of him who should suffer, because, he says, unless they put their trust in him, they shall suffer war for ever. Moses therefore placed one shield upon another in the midst of the fight, and standing there raised above them all kept stretching out his hands [εξετεινεν τας χειρας], and so Israel began to be victorious: then, whenever he let them drop they began to perish. (Barnabas 12:1-2)
- (3) And again he [the Spirit] says in another Prophet [Isaiah 65:2], “I stretched out my hands [εξεπετασα τας χειρας] the whole day to a disobedient people and one that refuses my righteous way.” (Barnabas 12:4)

Justin Martyr (wrote in A.D. 148-161)

- (4) How the Christ after his birth was to live hidden from other men until he grew to manhood, as also happened--hear the predictions that refer to this. There is this: “A child is born to us, and a young man is given to us, and the government will be upon his shoulders” testifying the power of the σταυρός, which when crucified he took upon his shoulders, as will be shown more clearly as the argument proceeds. Again the same prophet Isaiah, inspired by the prophetic Spirit, said: “I have stretched out my hands over a disobedient and contradicting people. . .” But Jesus Christ stretched out his hands when he was crucified by the Jews, who contradicted him and denied that he was Christ. (1 *Apology*, 35)¹²³
- (5) But never was the crucifixion imitated in the case of any of the so-called sons of Zeus; for they did not understand it since, as has been explained, everything said about it was expressed symbolically. Yet, as the prophet predicted, it [the σταυρός] is the greatest

¹²² Translated by Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers, with an English Translation*, in the *Loeb Classical Library*, (London: Heinemann, 1912-13).

¹²³ Translated by Cyril C. Richardson, in the *Early Christian Fathers Series*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953).

symbol of his power and authority, as [can be] shown from things you can see. Reflect on all things in the universe [and consider] whether they could be governed or held together without this figure. For the sea cannot be traversed unless the sign of victory, which is called a sail, remain fast in the ship; the land is not plowed without it; similarly, diggers and mechanics do not do their work except with tools of this form. The human figure differs from the irrational animals precisely in this, that man stands erect and can stretch out his hands, and has on his face, stretched out from the forehead, what is called the nose, through which goes breath for the living creature – and this exhibits precisely the figure of a *σταυρος*. (1 *Apology*, 55)

- (6) In the discussion of the nature of the Son of God in Plato's *Timaeus*, when he says, "He placed him like an X in the universe," this was similarly borrowed from Moses. For it is recorded in the writings of Moses that . . . Moses took brass and made the form of the *σταυρος* . . . Plato, reading this and not clearly understanding, not realizing that it was the form of the *σταυρος*, but thinking it was [the letter] *Chi*, said that the Power next to God was placed X-wise in the universe. (1 *Apology*, 60)
- (7) Moses himself, stretching out both hands, prayed to God for help. Now, Hur and Aaron help up his hands all day long, lest he should become tired and let them drop to his sides. For, if Moses relaxed from that figure, which was a figure of the *σταυρος*, the people were defeated (as Moses himself testifies), but as long as he remained in that position Amalec was defeated, and the strong derived their strength from the *σταυρος*. . . while the name of Jesus was at the battle front [in Joshua], Moses formed the sign of the *σταυρος*. (*Dialogue With Trypho*, 90)¹²⁴
- (8) Furthermore, God indicated in yet another way the power of the mystery of the *σταυρος* when He said through Moses, in the blessing pronounced over Joseph [Deuteronomy 33:13,17]: ". . . His beauty is as of a firstling of a bullock, and his horns are the horns of a rhinoceros; with them shall he push the nations even to the ends of the earth." Now, no one can assert or prove that the horns of a rhinoceros represent any other matter or figure than that of the cross. The one beam of the *σταυρος* stands upright, from which the upper part is lifted up like a horn when a crossbeam is fitted on, and the ends of the crosspiece resemble horns joined to that one horn. And the part which is fixed in the middle of the cross, on which the bodies of the crucified are supported, also projects like a horn, and it, too, looks like a horn when it is shaped and joined to the other horns. (*Dialogue*, 91)

Irenaeus (wrote in A.D. 177-200)

- (9) So by the obedience, whereby He obeyed unto death, hanging on the tree, He undid the old disobedience wrought in the tree. And because He is Himself the Word of God Almighty, who in invisible form pervades us universally in the whole world, and encompasses both its length and breadth and height and depth [Ephesians 3:17, 18] – for by God's Word everything is administered – the Son of God was also crucified in these, imprinted in the form of a cross on the universe. (*Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 34)¹²⁵
- (10) . . . and He too frees us from Amalec by stretching forth of His hands. . . . (*Ibid.*, 36)
- (11) But the words *whose government is set upon His shoulders* mean allegorically the Cross, on which He held His back when He was crucified. (*Ibid.*, 56)

¹²⁴ Translated by Thomas B. Fells, in the *Fathers of the Church Series*, (New York: Christian Heritage, 1948).

¹²⁵ Translated by Joseph P. Smith, in the *Ancient Christian Writers Series*, (Westminster, M.D.: Newman Press, 1952).

- (12) And again, concerning His Cross, Isaiah says as follows: *I have stretched forth my hands all the day to a stubborn and contrary people*; for this is a figure of the Cross. (*Ibid.*, 79)

Tertullian (wrote between A.D. 190-220)

- (13) You hang Christians on crosses [*crucibus*] and stakes [*stipitibus*]; what idol is there but is first moulded in clay, hung on a cross and stake [*cruci et stipiti*]? It is on a *patibulum* that the body of your god is first dedicated. (*Apologeticus*, 12,3)¹²⁶
- (14) It was certainly not intended to be a rhinoceros with one horn or a minotaur with two horns: rather in him Christ was indicated, a bullock according to both accounts, to some people stern as a judge, to others kind as a saviour, whose horns were to be extremities of the Cross. For in a yardarm [*antenna*], which is part of a cross [*quae crucis pars est*], the extreme ends are called horns, while the unicorn is the upright middle post [*medius stipitis palus*]. (*Adversus Marcionem* 3,18,3-4)¹²⁷
- (15) And again, why did Moses on that occasion only when Joshua was warring against Amalek, pray sitting and with outstretched hands [*expansis manibus*]? . . . Evidently because on that occasion, . . . the form of the cross [*crucis*] was essential. (*Ibid.*, 3,18,6)
- (16) For this same letter TAU of the Greeks, which is our T, has the appearance of the cross [*crucis*]. . . (*Ibid.*, 3,23,6)
- (17) If you want to be the Lord's disciple, you must take up your cross and follow the Lord, that is, you must take up your straits and your tortures or at least your body, which is like a cross. (*De Idol atria*, 12)¹²⁸

Minucius Felix (wrote around A.D. 200)

- (18) Crosses again we neither worship nor set our hopes on. You, who consecrate gods of wood, very possibly adore wooden crosses as being portions of your gods. For what are your standards, and banners, and ensigns but gilded and decorated crosses? Your trophies of victory show not only the figure of a simple cross [*simplicis crucis*], but also of one crucified. Quite true we see the sign of the cross naturally figured in a ship riding the swelling seas, or impelled by outspread oars; a crossbeam [*iugum*] set up forms the sign of the cross; and so too does a man with outstretched hands [*homo porrectis manibus*] devoutly offering worship to God. In this way the system of nature leans on the sign of the cross or your religion is shaped thereby. (*Octavius*, 29,6)¹²⁹

Clement of Alexandria (lived in c. A.D. 150-215)

- (19) The very man who . . . was bound by corruption, was shown to be free again, through His outstretched hands. (*Exhortation to the Greeks*, 11)¹³⁰

Firmicus (wrote in A.D. 346)

- (20) What are those horns which he boasts he possesses? . . . The horns signify nothing else but the worshipful sign of the cross. By one "horn" of this sign, the one which is elongated and vertical, the universe is held up and the earth held fast; and by the juncture of the two

¹²⁶ Translated by G. H. Rendall, in the *Loeb Classical Library*, (London: Heinemann, 1931).

¹²⁷ Translated by Ernest Evans, in the *Oxford Early Christian Texts Series*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

¹²⁸ Translated by S. L. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology: Selections From Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Jerome*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956).

¹²⁹ Translated by Rendall, see above.

¹³⁰ Translated by G. W. Butterworth, in the *Loeb Classical Library*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939).

horns which go off sidewise the East is touched and the West supported. . . . You, O Christ, with you outstretched arms support the universe and the earth and the kingdom of heaven. . . . To conquer Amalec, Moses stretched out his arms and imitated these horns. (*Error of the Pagan Religions*, 21,3-6)¹³¹

Rufinus (wrote in c. A.D. 404)

- (21) These words, *the height and breadth and depth*, are a description of the cross. The portion of it which is fixed in the earth he called *depth*. By *height* he meant the part which stretches above the earth and towers upwards, by *breadth* the parts which extend outwards to the right hand and the left. . . . His [Christ's] outstretched hands, moreover, according to the inspired prophet, He held out all day long to the people who were on the earth, testifying to the unbelievers and welcoming believers. (*Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*, 14)¹³²

Jerome (lived in A.D. 347-420)

- (22) "All the day I stretched out my hand to a people unbelieving and contradicting." The hands of the Lord lifted up to heaven were not begging for help, but were sheltering us, His miserable creatures. (*Homily*, 68)¹³³
- (23) What do the indignant say? "It might have been sold for three hundred denarii," for He who was to be anointed with this perfume was crucified. We read in Genesis that the ark that Noah built was three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high. Notice the mystical significance of the numbers. . . . Three hundred contains the symbol of the crucifixion. The letter T is the sign for three hundred. (*Homily*, 84)

Augustine (wrote in A.D. 412-414)

- (24) So, "being rooted and grounded in love," we may be able "to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth," that is, the Cross of the Lord. Its breadth is signified by the transverse beam on which the hands are extended; the length from the ground of that cross-bar is where the whole body from the hands down is fastened; the height, from the cross-bar up to the top which is near the head; the depth is that part which is concealed, driven into the earth. (*De Doctrina Christiana*, 2,41)¹³⁴
- (25) The figure of the cross appears in this mystery. For, He who died because he willed, died as He willed. Not without reason, therefore, did He choose this kind of death, nor would He have chosen it, except that in it He stood out as the master of this breadth and length and height and depth. For, there is breadth in that crossbeam which is fastened above; this refers to the good works because the hands are stretched there. There is length in the visible part of the beam which stretches from that one down to the earth. . . . The height is in that part of the cross which extends above the traverse beam, and is left to point upward, that is, at the head of the Crucified, And now, indeed, that part of the beam which does not appear, which is buried and hidden, from which the whole rises upward, signifies the depth of that freely given grace. (*Letters*, 26)¹³⁵

¹³¹ Translated by C. A. Forbes, in the *Ancient Christian Writers Series*, (New York, N.Y.: Newman Press, 1970).

¹³² Translated by J. N. D. Kelly, (Westminster, M.D.: Newman Press, 1955).

¹³³ Translated by M. L. Ewald, in the *Fathers of the Church Series*, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1966).

¹³⁴ Translated by J. J. Gavigan, in the *Fathers of the Church Series*, (New York: Cima Publishing Co., 1945).

¹³⁵ Translated by Wilfrid Parsons, in the *Fathers of the Church Series*, (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1953).

Paulinus of Nola (lived in A.D. 355-431)

- (26) So, too, they are ships floating on the waves of the world, armed with the oars of faith in the truth and of works of justice both on the right hand, as Scripture says, and on the left, . . . and they lash the sail of their hearts to the sailyard of the cross. (*Letters*, 23)¹³⁶
- (27) You will glide over a calm sea; your ship will be equipped with the cross as sailyard. (*Poems*, 17)¹³⁷
- (28) Our cross is fashioned in both these shapes. On the one hand, it forms the appearance of a yardarm or ship's mast, or of the conventional Greek symbol for 300, when it is fashioned with a single upright and a crosspiece joined to the top of it. (*Poems*, 19)

Examples such as these show that the tradition of the cross was not an invention from the time of Constantine, as suggested by the Society. Christians as early as Pseudo-Barnabas, drawing on a reservoir of oral memory, described Jesus' *σταυρος* as two-beamed. The discovery of the cross in the Old Testament through the use of typology reinforced these memories, and led Christians to regard it as something more than just an execution instrument. It became a sign for Christ's earthly suffering and redemptive sacrifice. Even those slightly or greatly out of step of orthodox Christianity maintained the same tradition, as can be seen from statements in pseudepigraphical and apocryphal writings:

The Odes of Solomon (late first century-early second century A.D.)

- (29) I extended my hands and hallowed my Lord. For the expansion of my hands is His sign. And my extension is the upright cross. (*Ode 27*)¹³⁸
- (30) I stretched out my hands towards the Lord, and towards the Most High I raised my voice. (*Ode 37:1*)
- (31) I extended my hands and approached my Lord, for my extension is the common cross, that was lifted up on the way of the Righteous One. (*Ode 42:1, 2*)

Sibylline Oracles (second century A.D.)

- (32) O wood, O most blessed, on which God was stretched out; earth will not contain you, but you will see heaven as home when your fiery eye, O God, flashes like lightning. (*SibOr 6,26-28*)¹³⁹
- (33) Moses prefigured him [Jesus], stretching out his holy arms, conquering Amalek by faith so that people might know that he is elect and precious with God his father. (*SibOr 8,251-253*)
- (34) He will stretch out his hands and measure the entire world. . . . First, then, the Lord was clearly seen by his own, incarnate as he was before, and he will show in hands in feet four marks fixed in his limbs, east and west and south and north. (*SibOr 8,302,318-321*)

Acts of Peter (late second century A.D.)

- (35) . . . For you should come up to the cross of Christ, who is the Word stretched out. . . . So that the Word is this upright tree on which I am crucified; but the sound is the cross-piece, the nature of man; and the nail that holds the cross-piece to the upright in the middle is the conversion (or turning point) and repentance of man.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Translated by P. G. Walsh, in the *Ancient Christian Writers Series*, (Westminster, M.D.: Newman Press, 1966-67).

¹³⁷ Translated by Walsh, (1975).

¹³⁸ Translated by J. H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

¹³⁹ Translated by Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigraphica*, Vol. 1, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985).

¹⁴⁰ Translated by G. C. Stead; published in *The Other Bible*, ed. by Willis Barnstone (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

Acts of Andrew (third century A.D.)

(36) And one part of you stretches up to heaven so that you may point out the heavenly logos, the head of all things. Another part of you is stretched out to right and left that you may put to flight the fearful and inimical power and draw the cosmos into unity. And another part of you is set on the earth, rooted in the depths.¹⁴¹

Pseudo-Titus Epistle (fifth century A.D.)

(37) The number also suggests the sign of the cross: for 300 is written with the Greek letter T, and T is the figure of the cross, which makes its appearance in the life of virginity.¹⁴²

So early Christians regardless of doctrinal persuasion agreed on the shape of Jesus' cross. No writer compared the cross to the Greek letter I or sought Old Testament parallels to such a shape. Only once has the Society ever discussed the value of the patristic evidence. Said the 22 November 1976 *Awake!*:

But do not writers early in the Common Era claim that Jesus died on a cross? For example, Justin Martyr (114-167 C.E.) described in this way what he believed to be the type of stake upon which Jesus died: "For the one beam is placed upright, from which the highest extremity is raised up into a horn, when the other beam is fitted on to it, and the ends appear on both sides as horns joined on to the one horn." This indicates that Justin himself believed that Jesus died on a cross.

However, Justin was not inspired by God, as were the Bible writers. He was born more than eighty years after Jesus' death, and was not an eyewitness of that event. It is believed that in describing the "cross" Justin followed an earlier writing known as the "Letter of Barnabas." This non-Biblical letter claims that the Bible describes Abraham as having circumcised three hundred and eighteen men of his household. Then it derives special significance from a Greek-letter cipher for 318, namely, IHT. The writer of this apocryphal work claims that IH represents the first two letters of "Jesus" in Greek. The T is viewed as the shape of Jesus' death stake.

Concerning this passage, M'Clintock and Strong's *Cyclopaedia* states: "The writer evidently was unacquainted with the Hebrew Scriptures, and has [also] committed the blunder of supposing that Abraham was familiar with the Greek alphabet some centuries before it existed." A translator into English of this "Letter of Barnabas" points out that it contains "numerous inaccuracies," "absurd and trifling interpretations of Scripture," and "many silly vaunts of superior knowledge in which its writer indulges." Would you depend on such a writer, or persons who followed him, to provide accurate information about the stake on which Jesus died?¹⁴³

Again, the Society's arguments are not convincing. Does someone really need to be either inspired or an eyewitness to report the factual information? If so, why do Watchtower publications frequently cite Tacitus and Josephus (two uninspired historians) as proving that Jesus was a historical person?¹⁴⁴ Justin's conception of the *σταυρος* as two-beamed was corroborated by other second-century Apologists such as Irenaeus and Tertullian (possibly also Melito of Sardis). This indicates that it must have had at least *some* substance to it. Furthermore, there is hardly any evidence suggesting a literary depen-

¹⁴¹ Translated by E. Best; published in Barnstone.

¹⁴² Translated by Schneemelcher; published in his *New Testament Apocrypha*, Vol. 2, p. 157.

¹⁴³ P. 27.

¹⁴⁴ *Is The Bible Really the Word of God?*, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1969), p. 63; *Reasoning*, pp. 209-210; *Greatest Man*, introduction: pp. 2-3.

dence between the Epistle of Barnabas and Justin's apologetical works. Although some of the types mentioned by Pseudo-Barnabas and Justin are the same, the two discussed by the Society (the "horn" and "circumcision" types) are unique to their respective authors.

The article then erroneously labelled the Epistle of Barnabas as apocryphal (neither is it pseudepigraphical since it nowhere claims to have been written by Barnabas), and dismissed its informative discussion on the cross because it indulged in "silly" typological interpretation. But this is an unfair criticism. Typology was a vital element of the *Zeitgeist* of early Christianity. It was freely used by first-century Christian writers (see Galatians 4:21-26; 1 Peter 3:20-21; 1 Clement 12:7-8). It would have been very natural for ordinary Christians to examine the Old Testament for prophetic references to the cross. It is rather strange that the Society would criticize Pseudo-Barnabas for interpreting the Scriptures in this manner since it has historically made excessive use of typology in its most arbitrary form.

The disparaging attitude manifested in the article is a departure from a more reasonable perspective expressed in the same journal two years earlier. The article "Benefiting From History" published in the 8 April 1974 *Awake!* admitted that it was fallacious to reject historical evidence merely "because of the uncertainties regarding some of the material presented by the ancient writers." In fact, the Watchtower writer went on to say that

even when the ancient writings are obviously poked with bias and personal loyalties, *certain descriptive material and circumstantial evidence may be correct and quite valuable*. Rather than giving up on history and pitching it all aside as useless, one needs to develop that important quality – discernment.¹⁴⁵

Finally, the 1976 article has left several important questions unanswered. If Jesus really did die upon a torture stake, then why did the primitive Christians without exception describe Jesus' *σταυρος* as two-beamed? How did that "false" tradition arise so early? How did it completely obscure the truth? When we compare the biblical evidence with that provided by biblical and patristic sources, it becomes clear that the *least likely* possibility is that Jesus was put to death upon a *crux simplex*.

VIII. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The most ambiguous source of information on the probable shape of Jesus' *σταυρος* is archaeology. In this section we will be dealing with two types of evidence: actual material remains of crucifixion victims and representations of the *σταυρος*. With one significant exception, none of the recovered artifacts settle the issue conclusively.

In June 1968 three tombs were accidentally discovered in Giv'at ha-Mitvar (north-east of Jerusalem), and the subsequent excavation by archaeologist Vasilius Tzaferis produced the only known remains of a crucifixion victim. According to Fitzmyer, "the lowest parts of the adult leg bones (*tibiae* and *fibulae*) had been broken, and the heel bones (*calcanei*) had been pierced by an iron nail."¹⁴⁶ An inscription on the ossuary gave the skeleton a name, Yehohanan.

The bones were then examined (somewhat hastily) by Dr. Nico Haas of Hebrew University Hadassah Medical School. His conclusions were summarized well in a 1987 *Watchtower* article:

¹⁴⁵ P. 24-25; italics mine.

¹⁴⁶ Fitzmyer, p. 495.

He reported that what was discovered was nothing less than the remains of a man executed on a cross in the first century. It seemed, basically, that the victim's two heels were nailed together to an upright stake, but the nail bent at the tip when it hit a knot in the wood. After the Jewish victim was dead, relatives had trouble pulling the nail free, so it was left in his heels at burial.¹⁴⁷

What about the upper limbs? Haas discovered a small scratch on one of the forearm bones and interpreted it as "osteological evidence of the penetration of the nail in the interosseous space between the radius and the ulna." On the basis of this evidence, Haas concluded that "the upper limbs were stretched out, each stabbed by a nail in the forearm."¹⁴⁸

Haas was unable to examine the remains any further because of serious health problems, and his conclusions became widely accepted.¹⁵¹ Even the Society published a brief report on the discovery, claiming quite inaccurately that Tzaferis discovered a victim of "impalement."¹⁵⁰ But doubts soon began to surface. In 1973 the eminent archaeologist Yigael Yadin rejected Haas' interpretation of the evidence, and proposed that "the heels were pierced and fixed together to be attached to two plaques of wood, acacia near the end of the nail, and olive near the point, and the nail was bent backwards to secure the attachment. The man was then fixed to the cross by being hung by his parted legs over the top of the cross – the legs with knees apart but with heels securely fastened together to form a loop over the top to prevent the body from sliding down."¹⁵¹ This hypothesis was considered by some as better than the one devised by Haas, but the latter prevailed among most scholars until 1985.

In that year, Joseph Zias, curator of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums, and Eliezer Sekeles, also from the Hebrew University Hadassah Medical School, reexamined the crucifixion remains. They discovered that Haas' analysis was fraught with errors:

The nail was shorter than Haas had reported and thus would not have been long enough to pierce two heel bones and the wood. Pieces of bone had been misidentified. There was no bone from a second heel; the nail pierced only *one* heel. Some of the bone fragments were from another individual.¹⁵²

Zias and Sekeles believed that "the most logical reconstruction would have the condemned straddling the upright with each foot nailed laterally to the cross."¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ 15 August 1987 *Watchtower*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁸ Nico Haas, "Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv'at ha-Mitvar, Jerusalem," *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 20 (1970), pp. 38-59.

¹⁵¹ See Fitzmyer, pp. 494-498; Tzaferis, "Crucifixion – The Archaeological Evidence," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Vol. 11 (1985), pp. 44-53; and virtually every Bible dictionary and encyclopedia since 1971.

¹⁵⁰ 22 February 1971 *Awake!*, p. 30

¹⁵¹ Fitzmyer, p. 497; Yadin, "Epigraphy and Crucifixion," *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 23 (1973), pp. 18-22.

¹⁵² 15 August 1987 *Watchtower*, p. 28-29. See Zias and Sekeles, "The Crucified Man from Giv'at ha-Mitvar: A Reappraisal," *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 35 (1985), pp. 22-27; Hershel Shanks, "New Analysis of the Crucified Man," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, November/December 1985, pp. 20-21.

¹⁵³ Zias and Sekeles, p. 26.

The two researchers also held that Yehohanan's arms were bound to a *patibulum* with ropes. The presence of the scratch in one of the forearms “was not convincing” evidence of a nail-wound, because “many non-traumatic scratches and indentations similar to these are found on ancient skeletal material. In fact, two similar non-traumatic indentations were observed on the right fibula, neither are connected with the crucifixion. . . Thus, the lack of traumatic injury to the forearm and metacarpals of the hand seems to suggest that the arms of the condemned were tied rather than nailed to the cross.”¹⁵⁴

The Society published a well-written article summarizing the new analysis in the 15 August 1987 *Watchtower*. It even included two illustrations depicting the reconstructions of Haas and Zias/Sekeles, which may have surprised some Witnesses. The article concluded that the evidence from Giv‘at ha-Mitvar adds very little to our knowledge of the manner how Jesus was executed. In this instance the Society is quite correct. Nothing indicates that a *patibulum* actually was attached to the victim's cross. Yehohanan may have very well extended his arms upward on a *crux simplex*. The evidence is so ambiguous concerning the arms that Zias and Sekeles had to rely on the data provided by Classical writings to support their reconstruction of the position of the arms.¹⁵⁵

Ambiguity plagues another important archaeological find relevant to our investigation, the so-called “Cross of Herculaneum.” Discovered in February 1939, it created a sensation similar to the one that followed the revelations from Giv‘at ha-Mitvar. Marcel Brion describes the object:

This cupboard, which can also be interpreted as an extremely simple altar, almost a *prie-dieu*, is topped by a cross marked on the wall: or to be more precise, what is seen today is the place where a wooden cross, fixed with nails, had been; around the arms of this cross, a section of wall had been whitened with lime, as if to provide a frame and background for the sacred sign. The cross having been removed, for some unknown reason, the shape of the arms shows bare.¹⁵⁶

Since Herculaneum was destroyed in the famous eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in A.D. 79, some writers have concluded that the wall-mark proves that early Christians – perhaps even Apostle Paul himself – revered the cross and believed that Jesus was put to death on a similarly-shaped object.¹⁵⁷

Such views, though romantic, overinterpret the data. There is hardly any evidence from the cross-mark itself that it has any relation with Christianity or the Crucifixion of Jesus. In fact, several sober researchers believe that the mark is actually an impression made by a small cabinet.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 24, 26.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 26. Curiously, Zias believes that Jesus was executed on a literal tree rather than a cross. See his letter printed in *Bible Review*, December 1989, p. 40, 41.

¹⁵⁶ Brion, *Pompeii and Herculaneum: The Glory and the Grief*, translated by John Rosenberg, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1960), pp. 82.

¹⁵⁷ Amedeo Maiuri, *Herculaneum*, translated by V. Priestley, (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico Dello Stato, 1962), p. 47; Joseph Jay Deiss, *Herculaneum: Italy's Buried Treasure*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 94-97; Carrington, pp. 205-206.

¹⁵⁸ Erich Dinkler, “Comments on the History of the Symbol of the Cross,” *Journal For Theology and the Church*, Vol. 1 (1965), pp. 124-146; G. de Jerphanion, “La croix d'Herculaneum?” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, Vol. 7 (1941), p. 5.; G. F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine*, (Macon, G.A.: Mercer University Press, 1985), p. 27.

The only unambiguous representation of the Crucifixion from before the time of Constantine was found inside the Paedagogium, on the slopes of Palatine Hill in Rome. In 1856 R. Garrucci examined the walls of this building (thought to be a prison for slaves), and discovered a caricature of the crucified Jesus. According to Jack Finegan, “this crude graffito shows a man's body with an ass's head, on a cross. The feet are supported on a platform and the outstretched arms fastened to the transverse bar of the cross. To the left is a smaller figure of a boy or young man in an attitude of adoration.”¹⁵⁹ The artist wrote the following inscription below the drawings: “ΑΛΕΧΑΜΕΝΟΣ ΣΕΒΕΤΕ ΘΕΟΝ,” which has been translated as “Alexamenos worships his god” or the vocative “Alexamenos, worship god.”¹⁶⁰

There can be little doubt that this blasphemous graffito was scrawled on the wall by a pagan slave. “Presumably this represents the mockery to which some young Christian in the imperial palace was subjected.”¹⁶¹ Tertullian wrote of a similar cartoon in his *Apologeticus*:

A new representation of our god has quite recently been publicized in this city, started by a certain criminal hired to dodge wild beasts in the arena. He displayed a picture with this inscription: “*Onokoites*, the god of the Christians.” The figure had the ears of an ass, one foot was cloven, and it was dressed in a toga and carrying a book. We laughed at both the caption and the cartoon.¹⁶²

The Palatine graffito is thought to date back to the reign of Emperor Marcus between A.D. 161 and A.D. 180, but some have dated it as late as Alexander Severus, A.D. 222-235.¹⁶³ It could be argued on the basis of these dates that the caricature is too late to really prove anything, but it nevertheless strengthens the testimony of the early Church Fathers. If the second-century apologists and their pagan adversaries both agreed that Jesus died upon a two-beamed cross, then there must be more substance to the tradition than is conceded by the Society.

IX. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Most Witnesses would probably agree that the “torture stake” doctrine is a relatively minor belief when compared with the basic tenants of their faith. The Watchtower Society publishes a complete discussion of this subject only once every two or three years, whereas vital doctrines revolving around christology, eschatology, and evangelism are covered every several months. What is the reason of this? Most probably it is because the doctrine is only secondary in nature, serving only to buttress the previously-existing belief that the cross is pagan. It is less important than the doctrines more central to their preaching work.

Possibly, also, the Society recognizes that the doctrine does not bear up to critical scrutiny. The belief that the key words *σταυρος*, *ξύλον*, and *crux* meant only “stake” is

¹⁵⁹ Finegan, *Light From the Ancient Past: The Archaeological Background of Judaism & Christianity*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 373.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*; Snyder, pp. 27-28.

¹⁶¹ Finegan, p. 373.; Michael Gough, *The Early Christians*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), pp. 83-84.

¹⁶² *Apologeticus*, 16,12-14; translated by Rudolph Arbesmann, et al., in the *Fathers of the Church Series*, (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1950).

¹⁶³ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, *The Early Christians In Rome*, (London: Methuen & Co., 1910).

demonstratively false. There is no reason why these words could not have denoted composite Roman crosses in the first century. The assumptions underlying the Society's restricted definition of these terms are equally false.

When the Society does discuss the relevant evidence, the articles are always much too brief and generally oversimplify the issue. Often they are little more than collections of quotes from other sources, such as W. E. Vine's lexicon. The eyeopening statements found in Classical and patristic literature are consistently ignored, as well as the clues provided by archaeology and the Bible itself. Whenever the Society does mention such evidence, it always finds a reason to explain it away. But most serious of all is the dishonest manner the Society has cited the ancient writers Lucian and Livy and modern works such as the *Catholic Commentary*.¹⁶⁴

Some might wonder why it is important to examine so thoroughly a relatively minor Watchtower teaching. There are two reasons for this. As revealed in court by Frederick Franz, the current president of the Society, Witnesses must unquestionably accept false teachings as Bible truth. If anyone even expressed his suspicions that a particular doctrine was false, he or she may be disfellowshipped.¹⁶⁵ This could even happen to individuals who doubt such minor doctrines as the "torture stake" doctrine. It is true that it will never be known beyond doubt what type of instrument was used to execute Jesus. But there is evidence – strong evidence – that it may have been a cross. What, therefore, is a Witness to do if he or she cannot believe in the Society's black-and-white doctrine? What is one supposed to do when his or her Bible falsely says that "the evidence is, therefore, completely lacking that Jesus was crucified on two pieces of timber placed at a right angle"?¹⁶⁶ Such a person may find it very difficult to have any independence of thought.

Secondly, this article has demonstrated that it fallacious to always favor the "basic meaning" of a word and restrict its semantic parameters. It is astonishing that some of the most crucial doctrines of the Witnesses owe their existence to semantic restriction. It would be worthwhile to examine whether *παρουσία* should really be defined as "presence," *κολασιν* as "cutting-off," and *αιδης* as "grave." The semantic restriction evident in the "torture stake" doctrine may well prove to be relevant to other teachings as well.

¹⁶⁴ This article would be incomplete if a comment regarding the Society's use of Justus Lipsius' major work *De Cruce Libri Tres* were not made. In the 1950 *New World Translation* appendix, the Society reprinted an illustration from the first volume of this work and stated quite dogmatically: "This is the manner in which Jesus was impaled." (P. 769-771; compare 22 June 1984 *Awake!*, p. 16) Understandably, many Witnesses came to believe that the illustration actually depicted Jesus, and that Lipsius believed that the latter was impaled on a stake. In fact, this error was clearly implied in the 15 February 1980 *Watchtower*. After describing a carving of Jesus crucified with his hands extended over his head (thought to have been made by Michelangelo), the article went on to say: "Whether the wooden sculpture is the work of the 16th-century artist Michelangelo or not, it illustrates that the impalement of Christ on a cross frame has not always been so certain as Christendom's leaders today would have people believe. For example, the 16th-century Roman Catholic scholar Justus Lipsius illustrated impalement in his book 'De Cruce Liber Primus.'" The truth is that Lipsius *did* believe that Jesus was put to death on a two-beamed cross. He examined the literary sources in great detail, and depicted variations of the *crux compacta* over a dozen times in his work.

¹⁶⁵ *Pursuer's Proof*, Douglas Walsh vs. the Right Honourable James Latham Clyde (1954), p.114, 119.

¹⁶⁶ 1950 *New World Translation*, p. 771.