

0240-0320 – Lactantius – Fragmenta

Fragments

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“Extremis temporibus Tiberii Cæsaris, ut scriptum legimus, Dominus noster Jesus Christus, a Judæis cruciatus est post diem decimum kalendarum Aprilis, duobus Geminis consulibus.”

Lactantius was writing in Nicomedia, and may have quoted from memory what he had read, perhaps in the report of Pilate himself. The expression *post diem decimum kalendarum Aprilis* is ambiguous: and Jarvis says, “My impression is, that it means ‘after the tenth day before the kalends of April;’ that is, after the 23d of March.”²⁰⁰¹

But here our author says, according to the accurate edition of Walchius²⁰⁰² (a.d. 1715),—

“Exinde tetrarchas habuerunt usque ad Herodem, qui fuit sub imperio Tiberii Cæsaris: cujus anno quinto decimo, id est duobus Geminis consulibus, ante diem septimam Calendarum Aprilium, Judæi Christum cruci affixerunt.”

But here, on the authority of forty manuscripts, Du Fresnoy reads, “ante diem decimam,” which he labours to reconcile with “post diem decimum,” as above. Jarvis adheres to the reading *septimam*, supported by more than fifty manuscripts, and decides for the 23d of March.

He cites Augustine to the same effect in the noted passage:²⁰⁰³—

“Ille autem mense conceptum et passum esse Christum, et Paschæ observatio et dies ecclesiis notissimus Nativitatis ejus ostendit. Qui enim mense nono natus est octavo kalendas Janvarias profecto mense primo conceptus est circa octavum kalendas Aprilis, quod tempus passionis ejus fuit.”

This, Augustine considers to be “seething a kid in mother’s milk,” after a mystical sense; cruelly making the cross to coincide with the maternity of the Virgin, who beheld her Son an innocent victim on the anniversary of her salutation by the angel.



FRAGMENTS OF LACTANTIUS

I. Fear, love, joy, sadness, lust, eager desire, anger, pity, emulation, admiration,—these motions or affections of the mind exist from the beginning of man’s creation by the Lord; and they were usefully and advantageously introduced into human nature, that by governing himself by these with method, and in accordance with reason, man may be able, by acting manfully, to exercise those good qualities, by means of which he would justly have deserved to receive from the Lord eternal life. For these affections of the mind being restrained within their proper limits, that is, being rightly employed, produce at present good qualities, and in the future eternal rewards. But when they advance²⁰⁰⁴ beyond their boundaries, that is, when they turn aside to an evil course, then vices and iniquities come forth, and produce everlasting punishments.²⁰⁰⁵

²⁰⁰¹ Baluz, *Miscellanea*, tom, i. p. 2.

²⁰⁰² *Opp.*, Ed. Walchii, p. 435.

²⁰⁰³ *Quæstt. in Exod.*, lib. ii., *Opp.*, tom. iii., p. 337.

²⁰⁰⁴ *Affluentes*.

²⁰⁰⁵ From *Muratorii Antiquit. Ital. med. æv.*

II. Within our memory, also, Lactantius speaks of metres,—the pentameter (he says) and the tetrameter.²⁰⁰⁶

III. Firmianus, writing to Probus on the metres of comedies, thus speaks: “For as to the question which you proposed concerning the metres of comedies, I also know that many are of opinion that the plays of Terence in particular have not the metre of Greek comedy,—that is, of Menander, Philemon, and Diphilus, which consist of trimeter verses; for our ancient writers of comedies, in the modulation of their plays, preferred to follow Eupolis, Cratinus, and Aristophanes, as has been before said.” That there is a measure—that is, metre²⁰⁰⁷—in the plays of Terence and Plautus, and of the other comic and tragic writers, let these declare: Cicero, Scaurus, and Firmianus.²⁰⁰⁸

IV. We will bring forward the sentiments of our Lactantius, which he expressed in words in his third volume to Probus on this subject. The Gauls, he says, were from ancient times called Galatians, from the whiteness of their body; and thus the Sibyl terms them. And this is what the poet intended to signify when he said,—

“Gold collars deck their milk-white necks,”²⁰⁰⁹ when he might have used the word *white*. It is plain that from this the province was called Galatia, in which, on their arrival in it, the Gauls united themselves with Greeks, from which circumstance that region was called Gallogræcia, and afterwards Galatia. And it is no wonder if he said this concerning the Galatians, and related that a people of the West, having passed over so great a distance in the middle of the earth, settled in a region of the East.²⁰¹⁰



THE PHENIX

BY AN UNCERTAIN AUTHOR. ATTRIBUTED TO *LACTANTIUS*²⁰¹¹

There is a happy spot, retired²⁰¹² in the first East, where the great gate of the eternal pole lies open. It is not, however, situated near to his rising in summer or in winter, but where the sun pours the day from his vernal chariot. There a plain spreads its open tracts; nor does any mound rise, nor hollow valley open²⁰¹³ itself. But through twice six ells that place rises above the mountains, whose tops are thought to be lofty among us. Here is the grove of the sun; a wood stands planted with many a tree, blooming with the honour of perpetual foliage. When the pole had blazed with the

²⁰⁰⁶ From *Maxim. Victorin. de carmine heroico*. Cf. Hieron., *Catal.*, c. 80. We have also another treatise, which is entitled “On Grammar.”

²⁰⁰⁷ μέτρον.

²⁰⁰⁸ From Rufinus, the grammarian, on *Comic Metres*, p. 2712.

²⁰⁰⁹ Virg., *Æn.*, viii. 660.

²⁰¹⁰ From Hieron., *Commentar. in ep. ad Gal.*, l. ii., opp. ed. Vallars. viii. 1, p. 426. Hieron., *De Viris Illus.*, c. 80: we have “four books of epistles to Probus.”

²⁰¹¹ [A curious expansion of the fable so long supposed to be authentic history of a natural wonder, and probably derived from Oriental tales corroborated by travellers. See vol. i. p. 12; also iii. 554. Yezedee bird-worship may have sprung out of it.]

²⁰¹² Remotus. The reference is supposed to be to Arabia, though some think that India is pointed out as the abode of the phoenix.

²⁰¹³ Hiat.