

No luck at Library of Congress
on checking names as yet. Will
let you know when I run it
down.

JFM

Princeton, Indiana

9 November 1948

Dear Mr Friedman,

You may recall that several months ago I mentioned having seen a description of a cipher used by the Roman Emperor, Augustus, and his wife, Livia, for their private correspondence and for the secret "dossiers" maintained on all of their opponents and political enemies. While I have been at home I hunted up the reference and am including a transcript thereof. You will notice that it is not taken from an ancient writer but instead is from a modern "historical novel" by the British writer Robert Graves. In addition to the book from which I have cited, "I Claudius", Graves has written several other historical novels including a second book on Claudius ("Claudius the God" - covering the reign of Claudius as fourth emperor of Rome, "I Claudius" being concerned with the principate of Augustus and the reigns of Tiberius and Caligula, the second and third emperors), a novel about Belisarius, the general who reconquered Italy for Justinian, the Eastern Roman Emperor, from the Ostrogoths in the sixth century A.D., a novel about Milton, and more recently two "novels" presenting an interpretation of the voyage of the Argonauts for the Golden Fleece ("Hercules My Shipmate") and a relatively ignored story of the life of Jesus ("King Jesus"- which I expected to be proscribed and banned

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by both Catholics and Protestants) both of which latter leaned heavily on the modern studies of ancient magic and religious cults begun by Frazer's "The Golden Bough". I mention these additional works by Graves merely as evidence that he is a competent historian. I have read all of them except the one concerning Milton, and they all reveal a very high familiarity with the ancient sources. In the case of the two books on Claudius I have had occasion to check on a number of stories and statements woven into his narrative and the basic facts and statements in all of them are based on source materials. Graves has taken an astonishingly large number of allusions to the life of Claudius from classical Latin, Greek, and even Hebrew writers (notably Josephus) and has also availed himself of epigraphic and archaeological materials and has assembled them in historical novel form merely by the device of a fictional personal narrative. His novels have not been noted by orthodox historians, however, because he has not bothered to footnote and document the exact classical source for his individual episodes and events. I therefore am not able at present to trace this description of the cipher to a classical source but will attempt to do so at my first opportunity to visit the Library of Congress. I have digressed with the above account of Graves, his writings, and his apparent methods, solely to indicate the reason I have for not questioning his veracity. I have no doubt that an ancient source can be found which will give a description of this Augustan cipher--so far as I know it is not generally known to cryptographers.

I hope you will find this description interesting and I will let you know if I succeed in tracing down Graves' source,

unless, as may well be the case, you are already familiar with it and can tell me where to look.

Private Cipher of Augustus and Livia.

Robert Graves, I Claudius (New York, 1934) p. 248:

The common cipher was simply writing Latin E for Greek Alpha, Latin F for Greek Beta, G for Gamma, H for Delta and so on. [Cf. the so-called "Julius Caesar Cipher" or "Caesar".] The key of the higher cipher was next to impossible to discover. It was provided by the first hundred lines of the first book of the Iliad, which had to be read concurrently with the writing of the cipher, each letter in the writing being represented by the number of letters of the alphabet intervening between it and the corresponding letter in Homer. Thus the first letter of the first word of the first line of the first book of the Iliad is Mu. Suppose the first letter of the first word of an entry in the dossier to be Upsilon. There are seven letters in the Greek alphabet intervening between Mu and Upsilon [Mu, Nu, Xi, Omicron, Pi, Rho, Sigma, Tau, Upsilon.] so Upsilon would be written as 7. In this plan the alphabet would be thought of as circular, Omega, the last letter, following Alpha, the first, so that the distance between Upsilon and Alpha would be 4 but the distance between Alpha and Upsilon would be 18. It was Augustus's invention.

I don't see what they would use if Omega and Alpha were involved as they did not have a zero sign. Possibly the original from which Graves is translating will have additional information.

I hope to find you back at work when I return the 18th.

Yours,

Thomas A. Miller