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Quid Est Veritas?: Pontius Pilate in Fact, Fiction, Film and Fantasy*

Henry Innes MacAdam

Pontius Pilate is the subject of three new books published in three successive years: Helen Bond's *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation* (1998), Anne Wroe's *Pontius Pilate* (1999) and James Mills' *Memoirs of Pontius Pilate* (2000). The books by Bond and Wroe (unlike that by Mills) aren't fiction, and therefore offer readers the opportunity to compare and contrast two very different and very stimulating approaches to historical investigation. This article not only serves as an in-depth review of those two books, but also introduces material related to Pilate which they failed to include

I believe that people write autobiographies for two main reasons. The first may be called the "Chronicler's urge." The second may be called the "*Ecce Homo* motive." Both impulses spring from the same source, which is the source of all literature: the desire to share one's experiences with others... Arthur Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue* (1952) 23.

* A review article based on Helen K. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation* (Cambridge, CUP, 1998) pp. xxv + 249. ISBN 0-521 631149; Ann Wroe, *Pontius Pilate* (New York, Random House, 1999) pp. xv + 412. ISBN: 0-375-50305-6. Grateful thanks to the staffs of the Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary; Historical Studies and Social Sciences Library, The Institute for Advanced Study; and the Washington Township Library, Robbinsville, NJ for assistance.

Introduction:

Whether it's one of a small collection of coins he minted mid-way through his governorship of Judaea, or the epigrammatic aspect of the Vulgate's rendering of his "trial talk," or the evocation of his name in the title of a volume on the British Mandate period in Palestine (Marlowe, 1959), Pontius Pilate has continued to exercise the imagination of poets, dramatists, theologians, Roman historians and archaeologist, novelists, political analysts and scriptwriters. It would appear that only in the realm of grand opera is he unsung. A search on the Internet under "Pontius Pilate" will garner several hundred references. Where to begin is always problematical.

Pilate research had its foundations laid more than one century ago. It's an interesting exercise in antiquarianism for scholars of the NT to open the pages of the *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*, the ongoing register of everyone known to have lived in the first three centuries A.D. and one of the great legacies of 19th century German scholarship. There in Vol. III (1898), on p. 84, under entry # 607, among three pages of individuals known by the ancient tribal name (*gentilicium*) of Pontii (i.e. *gens Pontia*), is "Pontius Pilatus."

That entry is far more extensive than for other members of the *Pontii* because the individual concerned presided over the tribunal, and ordered the execution, of Jesus of Nazareth. Not only are there references to the standard Christian sources but also to the Jewish theologian Philo of Alexandria (c.20 B.C.-c.A.D. 50) as well as to the Jewish priest-become-general-become historian Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37/38-c.100).

Such a rarefied scholarly atmosphere includes a register of 68 Pontii in the similarly prestigious reference work, Pauly-Wissowa's *Realencyclopädie* Vol. 22.1 (s.v. *Pontius* cols. 30-46), which itself (pub. 1953) is based on *PIR* and Ollivier, 1896. "Pontius Pilate" is # 43 in that register, but the note there refers us to the separate article in *RE* 20.2 cols. 1322-4 s.v. "Pilatus." The bibliography on Pilate is enormous; interested readers will find that those sources documented by Bond and Wroe are excellent, albeit brief, samplings.

From that heavily academic realm we may pass to a less formal approach, that of cinema trivia quiz. The setting for the question will be familiar to anyone who has seen any New Testament epic that features Pilate: e.g. Graeco-Roman architecture in the background, a tribunal in progress, and at one point (though not in every case) a closeup view of a man ceremoniously cleansing his hands in water:

Question:

What do (as listed in alphabetical order) Richard Boone, David Bowie, Hurd Hatfield, Arthur Kennedy, Gary Oldman, Donald Pleasence, Telly Savalas, Rod Steiger and Frank Thring (inter alia) have in common?

Answer:

*All played the role of Pontius Pilate in commercial or TV films released in the second half of the 20th century. Bowie is the only actor on this list who is mentioned in the volume by Ann Wroe under review**.*

There is no cinema stereotype for Pilate; Donald Pleasence and Telly Savalas were bald and clean-shaven but Gary Oldman and Frank Thring were hairy-headed and bearded; the rest conformed to Wroe's Pilate and were hairy-headed and clean-shaven. Hirsute or not, most fit the general description of Pilate found in a still-popular book on the last day of Jesus: "a short, patrician-looking man of about 50 years of age" (Bishop, 1957: 259). The author, born in 1907 and 5'6" (1.65m)

** *Pilate in the cinema (1950-2000): Richard Boone (The Robe, 1953); Frank Thring (Ben-Hur, 1959); Hurd Hatfield (King of Kings, 1961); Arthur Kennedy (Barabbas, 1962); Telly Savalas (The Greatest Story Ever Told, 1965); Donald Pleasence (The Passover Plot, 1975); Rod Steiger (Jesus of Nazareth, 1977); David Bowie (The Last Temptation of Christ, 1989); Gary Oldman (Jesus, 2000). The Italian-French co-production Ponzio Pilato (1962), incorrectly characterized by Wroe (p. 39) as "the only film made exclusively from his [i.e. Pilate's] point of view," is actually one of two, the other being the U.S.A.-produced Pontius Pilate (1964). Unfortunately I have not been able to obtain a copy of either.*

in height, was of course describing himself. Luckily, Anne Wroe is exempt from such a self-reflective portrait in words, and Helen Bond would not be bound to speculate on Pilate's visage.

Yet there are aspects of Pontius Pilate's historical and non-historical career that have attracted constant attention over the past two millennia. That is at least in part because the fame that he enjoys is itself reflective--were it not for the Galilean Jew whose temporal fate he decided one spring morning in Jerusalem, it is doubtful that we would know much about him beyond a few remarks on his governorship, his name and title within a Latin inscription, and a few coins from his mint. One is reminded of what a mistress of the Duke of Wellington is said to have told him: "Napoleon will be remembered for himself. You will be remembered for Napoleon."

Pilate in Recent Studies:

Pontius Pilate is the subject of three new books published in three successive years: Helen Bond's *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation* (1998), Anne Wroe's *Pontius Pilate* (1999) and James Mills' *Memoirs of Pontius Pilate* (2000). Of these, the latter is a novel and only tenuously related to historical fact. As such, it is best reviewed in literary journals and trade magazines, but only if prospective reviewers skip its disastrously inept (and unnecessary) "Editor's Note" (Mills, 2000: 6). The books by Bond and Wroe aren't fiction, and therefore offer reviewers the opportunity of comparing and contrasting two very different, very stimulating, approaches to historical investigation.

Ann Wroe, according to the dust jacket's brief biography, has written two other books on disparate topics: contemporary American politics (*Lives, Lies and the Iran-Contra Affair*, 1991) and French medieval history (*A Fool and His Money*, 1995). Those, her doctoral degree in history from Oxford, and her editorial work on Britain's *Economist*, are interesting credentials for a biographer of Pilate.

Wroe makes no attempt in the Introduction to place her *Pontius Pilate* in a specific literary genre, and wisely so. It combines an element of what the late Truman Capote termed a "non-fiction novel" (see his *In Cold Blood*, 1966), or what Paul Maier characterized as "the

documented historical novel” (Maier, 1996: vii) with a heady admixture of tradition, legends, folk-tales, and apocryphal stories from antiquity and the middle ages, plus references to (sometimes excerpts from) modern or contemporary literature (e.g. M. Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita* 1967 [originally written in 1938]). Wroe’s bibliography is thus a rich compendium of literary ephemera as well as books and articles from mainstream scholars of biblical as well as classical studies.

Helen Bond is a Lecturer in New Testament at the University of Aberdeen and co-editor (with George J. Brooke) of the commemorative compendium (pictorial, on microfiche) about the Dead Sea Scrolls, *The Allegro Qumran Collection* (1996). Her *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation* revises a doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Durham. In contrast to Wroe, Bond’s study focuses on the six primary sources for our knowledge of Pilate: Philo Judaeus, Josephus, and the four Gospels (Luke/Acts being considered a single work). Bond’s motivation is simple: “[T]here has never been a full-length academic treatment of the historical governor [of Judaea] in English” (xvi). The emphasis in the quote is mine; Bond’s quest for the “historical Pilate” is closely linked to other such endeavours.

Since Bond’s quest is purely academic and her sources limited, she makes no effort to venture into the highly speculative realm of Pilate’s career before and after his governorship of Judaea. Indeed so closely does she stick to those historical sources that readers unaware of ancient or medieval literary treatments of Pilate might miss completely the way in which the judge of Jesus of Nazareth has continued to serve as a two-way mirror. Some may examine, from the same sources Bond scrutinizes, his character and motives regarding the decision to execute Jesus. Others, looking outward from Pilate in the first century to their own times, may discover something of themselves within the legends and tales later associated with him.

Bond’s approach to her subject is simple and programmatic: to scrutinize (after an introductory chapter, “Pontius Pilate and the Roman Province of Judaea”) in turn the six major ancient sources of information about Pilate. To that end she devotes a chapter to each one. For Philo and Josephus, the events described are presented in

translation, discussed in detail (including theological/rhetorical themes), and then compared with what is known of the event(s) from other sources. The Gospels are dealt with according to the probable sources available to each writer and the characterization of Pilate in each of the four trial narratives. A separate chapter is devoted to "Historical Events Behind the Gospel Narratives."

Wroe provides, beyond the introductory notes, a framework for her book in a Prologue and Epilogue entitled "Pilate on the Beach," two memorable scenes in which she explores the governor's "legacy." Between those she sets out to reconstruct portions of Pilate's life in seven chapters, beginning with his probable origins ("The Forum and the Forest") and ending with his recall to Rome after Samaritan complaints about his handling of a civil disturbance in that region ("Through Brake, Through Briar"). Within those seven chapters, Wroe allows herself to examine Pilate's career not only through the same sources available to Bond, but by utilizing cinema, novels, and the abundant variety of Pilate apocrypha--particularly British medieval mystery plays (which didn't impress one reviewer; see Price, 2000).

Pilate's Origins and Career:

What we know of Pilate centres on his brief, decisive role in the Gospels, and several other confrontational incidents during his governorship described by Josephus and Philo (*Luke* 13:1 appears to be independent). On the development of Pilate's career as a subject of scholarly and literary interest, see Bond's Preface (esp. pp xi-xvi). We know most about Pilate from Josephus, whose major interest in the *Antiquities* and the *War* was to demonstrate to non-Jewish (in particular, Roman) readers how the origins of the Jewish War might be found within the strained relations between rulers and subjects. This was manifested through the succession of provincial governors, most of whom were seldom sensitive to Jewish demands for "special" consideration. For the governors of this entire era, as well as a summary of the reign of Agrippa I (41-44) which marked but a brief hiatus, see Schürer I: 361-98.

Thus there has always been a need to supply other details of Pilate's life from legend or myth; the apocryphal *Acta Pilati* (4th century at the latest; on this see R.E. Brown, 1994: 712-713) was only the first of

many “fictional recreations” of Pilate’s role in the death of Jesus and in the subsequent development of the Church. For a comprehensive summary of legends and miracles about Pilate or his wife from antiquity until medieval times, see Maier (1971). But even those, as Wroe clearly demonstrates, have limitations--none of them account for the years prior to Pilate’s arrival in Caesarea in A.D. 26 upon his appointment as the fifth of the 13 or 14 *praefecti et procuratores Iudaeae* (on the number, see Bond: 8 note #42).

Wroe provides precisely that missing genealogical and cultural background to the extent that references to the Pontii in available sources allow such historical reconstruction. This is where *Pontius Pilate* serves as both a sourcebook for the interested student, and as an adventurous narrative tale for the casual reader. Chapter 2, “The Forum and the Forest,” is where Wroe sets out to explore what is known of Pilate’s ancestry; here is how she begins (Wroe, 14):

He was born a few years before Christ, somewhere in Italy, most probably in Rome. This was not, in the deepest sense, his country. His ancestors were mountain men from Samnium, south of Rome. There in the brutal hills men scratched at stony plots, women spun wool; they worshipped oak groves and springs and woodpeckers, and their talk was of war. From time to time, the Samnites would descend to the poppy-strewn fields of the Campania, which they devastated. For years they fought the Romans, but in 290 B.C. Rome defeated them.

The enmity between the Pontii and their Latin/Roman overlords lasted through the end of the Republic. Readers who would prefer a quick overview to Wroe’s detailed account may consult with profit J.P. Brown (2000: 249-250). Not noted by Wroe or Bond is the Latin inscription (*CIL* XI.2.1.4396, undated) from Ameria, 32 km east of Volsinii (the ancient Etruscan town) which was copied in a village church. Worth remembering is that this volume of *CIL* was dedicated to *Inscriptiones Falsae vel Alienae*:

PILATVS
IIII VIR
QVINQ

Wroe inadvertently but coincidentally mentions that the eighth century fantasy, *The Healing of Tiberius*, has that emperor send his former governor of Judaea into exile in “a place called Ameria in Tuscany” (Wroe, 359). This might be what Mommsen alluded to when he quoted an earlier statement in his commentary to this inscription: *vetus esse traditio Pilatam familiam fuisse Amerinam sicut et ipsum Pontium Pilatum*. The text (of which I owe knowledge to John Pairman Brown), presumably incomplete when copied, attests someone (whose cognomen is that of the Judaeen governor) as *quat(t)uovir*, one of four (there might be fewer in other cities) municipal magistrates (each a *vir quinquennalis*) supervising “the five-yearly [census].”

Etruria is far from Samnite territory in south-central Italy, and the descriptive nickname “Pilatus” (from the *pilum* or lengthy throwing-spear) is perhaps more common than we might realize. For those historians who favor a close connection between the career of Pilate and that of Tiberius’ manipulative confidante Aelius Sejanus (see below), the fact that Sejanus’ family was from Volsinii (*OCD*³ 19) will be of particular (though again, coincidental) interest. On Sejanus’ alleged anti-Jewish bias, and Pilate, see Bond: xiii-xvi.

However tenuous the connection, it is worth remembering that the Oscan-speaking, freedom-loving Pontii from which Pilate emerged do have some Etruscan connections. Pontius Aquila, a tribune of 45 B.C. and one of Julius Caesar’s assassins, is believed to have come from the small town of Sutrium north of Rome, within the borders of Etruria. Perhaps Aquila’s family was among the colonists settled in that region after the Social War (which ended in the mid 80s B.C.).

However that might be, by the reign of Tiberius (A.D. 14-37) the Samnites were loyal, romanized citizens already upwardly mobile by way of the military, in which their famed fighting skills could be utilized. That could eventually lead some to political office in the equestrian class and/or to service in the imperial bureaucracy. We may assume that Pontius Pilate’s qualifications for governorship of Judaea included military expertise and administrative abilities. On that point,

both Wroe and Bond are clear--see especially Bond's opening Chapter (cited by title above).

Pilate and Caesaraea Maritima:

Indeed, it is those combined abilities that Tiberius expected in his equestrian governors, or at least those serving in Judaea, Thrace, and the provinces of western Africa (the two Mauretaniae). Though the governors of Egypt did not outrank Pilate in theory, a province of such major importance to the Empire meant that the men who governed it were, in fact, held in special esteem. Egypt would normally be administered by someone of senatorial, i.e. "consular" rank (as was, e.g. Syria's governor), but from the time of Augustus on the need to keep the Nile region out of the hands of ambitious men meant that equestrians of proven ability would hold that post.

Wroe and Bond are well aware of the famous Latin inscription, which mentions Pilate in an undated context, discovered precisely 40 years ago at Caesarea-on-the-Sea. Not only is it an independent attestation of his governorship but it connects him firmly with the city that had served as provincial capital since the annexation of Judaea in A.D. 6. Both devote considerable but warranted attention (Wroe: 88-90; Bond: 11-12) to those four lines of damaged text:

*J S TIBERIÉVM
J TIVS PILATVS
J ECTVS IVDA--E
J É[*

The stone had been re-used as a stair tread when the Herodian theatre was refurbished in later times. That theatre has another NT connection. It is there that Josephus *Ant.* 19.8.2 locates the death of Agrippa I in A.D. 44. Acts 12: 20-23 puts Agrippa, at the moment of his death, on the same tribunal chair (within the palace) which Pilate earlier, and Felix and Festus later, would have utilized to address audiences and/or to pass judgments--such as that upon Paul.

Where the Pilatus inscription had been originally and what it commemorated is the crux of the ongoing debate since its discovery. Wroe claims no epigraphic skills, but notes that there have been as

many attempts to restore the full text as there has been a lack of consensus on what it commemorated. Most believe that a building was dedicated to the Emperor Tiberius by his loyal *Praefectus Iudaeae*—whose *praenomen* was undoubtedly on the stone, perhaps abbreviated. Unfortunately in its reuse, the block was chipped away, leaving the remaining letters *JTIVS PILATVS*. The nomen *Pontius* means “fifth” (= *Quintus*) in Osco-Umbrian. The *Tiberéium* may have been dedicated by Pilate on behalf of the people of Caesaraea, i.e. restoring (as has been plausibly suggested) *CAESARIEN]S(IVVS)* in the first line.

What that building was, or the occasion of its dedication, may never be known, but that doesn’t discourage scholarly imagination— Geza Alföldy (1999) is convinced that a lighthouse above the harbor at Caesaraea had been restored and dedicated to Tiberius by Pilate. In his reconstruction of the text, line 1 should then read *NAVTI]S TIBERIÉVM* and the verb in line 4 should be *REF]É[CIT]*, rather than the *D]É[DIT]* favored by those who see the building as being a first-time dedication to the Emperor. Bond (referring to Lémonon, 1981), accepts that the construction may have been no more than a secular building of modest proportions. Maier (1996: 83) suggested a small basilica. Perhaps this inscription did not commemorate a building, but an occasion. As I noted several years ago (MacAdam, 1995: 168), reading *MUNV]S TIBEREIVM [PON]TIVS PILATVS [PRAEF]ECTVS IVDA[EA]E*—i.e. commemoration of “la célébration de la *munificentia principis* à Rome et en Judée [in A.D. 30]” may be the closest we can get to the original—as proposed by Labbé (1991: 289-290). Those variant readings aren’t noted by Wroe or Bond (but see Maier, 1996: 358).

However one interprets it, this inscription is important for several reasons. No other governor of Judaea is known to us through epigraphy until the period right after the First Jewish War—a fact which both NT scholars and Roman historians don’t fully appreciate. The use of Latin where Greek is more common for public dedications is also worthy of note (Wroe acknowledges this)—Pilate’s intention here was to emphasize the *Romanitas* of Caesaraea. Pilate’s name in the nominative case is also unusual; similar dedications are mostly by or through (i.e. Latin *per*) the named official *to* the Emperor of the day.

The dedication also draws attention to Caesarea as the normal, official residence of the governors of Judaea—nowhere acknowledged in the Gospels, but powerfully and appropriately depicted in *Acts*—Paul’s two trials (under Felix and then Festus), that bookended his two-year imprisonment there (*Acts* 23:33-27:1) are at the very least composed by someone with an excellent source—perhaps the memory of an eyewitness. Pilate’s *praetorium* there, just as at Jerusalem, was Herod’s Palace, the reception hall of which has now been uncovered.

The site of that complex, for long no more than a rubble heap on a seaside promontory at Caesaraea, is now undergoing intensive excavation and restoration. Too recent to be acknowledged by Wroe or Bond are detailed archaeological reports about those discoveries (Gleason, 1998), but Wroe clearly demonstrates a keen interest in archaeological work. The administration buildings (upper and lower levels) date from the late first century B.C. when Herod the Great created the city of Caesaraea on the site of a Hellenistic trading post. Those buildings were continuously inhabited—first by Herod, then by his son Archelaus, later by the *praefecti* including Pilate, by Agrippa I, and thereafter by seven successive *procuratores* until the outbreak of war in 66. Bond seems unaware of these excavations.

From A.D. 70 until the Islamic conquest the complex was “home” to the long succession of late Roman and Byzantine governors, some of whom modified and augmented the original structures. Nearby are the remains of the theatre, an amphitheatre-hippodrome, and a high-level aqueduct which supplied the city with water from Mt. Carmel. At the entrance to the *praetorium* a Latin mosaic inscription notes: **SPES BONA ADIV(T)ORIBVS OFFICI CVSTODIAR(VM)**, which the excavators rendered “Good Hope to the Assistants of the Office of the Guards.” It dates to “the second half of the second century at the earliest” (Gleason 48). Thus Pilate never saw it, nor did Paul. Origen might have, and surely it was visible to the city’s irrepressible bishop, Eusebius, whose *patria* was Caesaraea Maritima (on that city in late antiquity see now Patrich, 2001).

Pilate as Governor of Judaea:

Perhaps Pilate was about 35 when he arrived in Judea, and thus 45 when he left for Rome. Tall or short, stout or slender, distant or

friendly, officious or efficient, chronically ill or constantly healthy, observant or myopic, witty or dull, self-assured or unduly hesitant, pensive or active, gluttonous or abstemious, rational or superstitious, spiritual or skeptical, cruel or kind—all of those physical and mental aspects of his *persona* are unknown, and remain unknowable. “Of Pilate,” writes Wroe (39), “only two things can be said for certain: that he was, according to the imperial fashion of the day, short-haired and clean-shaven;” on that latter aspect she appears to have developed something of a fixation.

That is a minimalist view and strangely centred on appearance rather than performance. We may be certain that Pilate as governor—and every indication is that he was an effective prefect of Judaea—would familiarize himself with his province as soon as he could. From Caesarea he and his entourage must have taken extensive tours of Judaea, Samaria and Idumaea to familiarize himself and his staff with the strategic layout of those three regions, and the economic resources available to the imperial fiscus. His civil and military authority within the province were absolute, and in the absence of a regular governor in Syria for the first five years of office, he probably enjoyed more latitude in daily administration than most of his predecessors and successors.

We can compare and contrast Pilate’s known actions with those of others of his place and time. Among the Judaeen governors prior to the Jewish War, Pilate must be ranked as more capable than most. During the first half of his tenure (26-31), he administered Judaea while the governor-designate of Syria (L. Aelius Lamia) was kept in Rome for reasons still not completely clear (Dabrowa, 1998: 35-38):

Lamia’s absence from [Syria] did have its negative aspects as the actions there of [the acting governor or *pro-legatus*] Pacuvius show ... A reference in one of Seneca’s letters indicates that the situation in the province under his leadership was unsatisfactory. Indirect proof is provided in another passage of the same letter in which Seneca portrays Pacuvius in a rather unfavourable light (*ibid*, 36).

Although the equestrian prefects of Judaea acted independently of the consular legates of Syria--i.e. Pilate had full authority to act as he saw fit in matters civil and military within his province --Syrian governors were empowered to intervene whenever a situation warranted (e.g. the demonstrable incompetence or incapacity of the prefect, or the need for military assistance in a time of crisis). That the vitally important frontier province of Syria was governed badly in the late 20s may have affected affairs in Judaea--a matter which Roman historians and NT scholars may want to investigate.

In the first five years of Pilate's tenure, he might not have had the full support of Syria's acting governor, Pacuvius--and it's not too speculative to suggest that anti-Roman elements within the Judean priestly hierarchy (Martin Goodman's "governing class") saw several opportunities to test the new prefect's mettle. Pilate was, after all, governor of the only province of the Empire in which the majority of the inhabitants were committed--in simple, private ways of faith, or in pious, public shows of sanctity--to the strictures of a Holy Book which dominated every aspect of their lives. Perhaps it is only the Pilate of Zefferelli's monumental *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) who tries to come to terms with that--and inevitably fails.

Pilate's tenure of office (A.D. 26-36/37) suggests that he was capable in both areas of provincial affairs, though from the onset he became confrontational towards the Jewish hierarchy. We cannot, unfortunately, be certain of the order of events during his decade in office; attempts to sequentialize them are very speculative. On several occasions (displaying military standards within the Temple area, or bringing votive shields into Herod's Palace in Jerusalem) he either backed down himself, or was ordered to do so by Tiberius.

At other times (confiscating Temple funds to build an aqueduct in Jerusalem; attacking Galilean pilgrims during a religious feast) he ordered the troops at his disposal to use force against those he deemed responsible for civil disturbances. It is of course to those critical junctures that both Wroe and Bond take us by means of the available historical sources. About those Wroe summarizes: "All of them have their biases. Each offers a version of Pilate's character but is so wrapped in propaganda or agendas that it's very difficult to detect what, if anything, may be true in them" (Wroe: xii).

Bond posits two interrelated queries: "How do Philo, Josephus and the four gospels portray Pilate, and what rhetorical concerns have shaped these interpretations of the governor? In particular have these differing literary presentations of the Roman prefect been influenced by their authors' attitudes to the Romans with whom they have come in contact?" (Bond: xvii). Even so, it remains the duty of the interested amateur and the seasoned historian alike to follow through and connect the dots whenever and wherever one can.

That is precisely what Bond and Wroe do; to their credit they make excellent sense of the various strands of evidence. It clearly helps that, even with the Christian sources aside, we know more of Pilate than of any of his predecessors (and most of his successors) as governor of Judaea. Bond (xvi and *passim*) makes especially good use of what may be the best recent assessment of the two "secular" sources, Philo and Josephus, a study made a decade ago by Brian C. McGing (1991), who compares their portraits of Pilate with that of the same governor in the Gospels. His study is just one of several important secondary sources which escaped Wroe's attention.

McGing's conclusion is that there is no substantial difference between the Christian and non-Christian accounts; we may see Pilate as sometimes hesitant and vacillating, and sometimes as determined or even harsh. It depended on the situation and his reaction to it. Certainly McGing is correct in minimizing, if not eliminating, the arguments that Pilate's coinage, and his alleged ties to Tiberius' "minister of state," L. Aelius Sejanus, were indicative of an anti-Jewish attitude which Pilate had to reverse quickly when he learned that Sejanus had been executed for treason in 31--which in turn has been used to date the Crucifixion in A.D. 33 (Maier, 1968). No date later than that is credible--though no one has been more determined to make it as late as Pilate's last year as governor than Kokkinos (1989). Wroe (25-26) and Bond (22-23) are admirably circumspect in regard to any Pilate-Sejanus connection.

McGing's review of Pilate's action in Josephus' account (*Ant.* 18.85-90) of the governor's dispersal of the armed Samaritans who had been duped into searching for sacred vessels said to have been "buried by Moses" on Mt. Gerizim is also worthy of close attention. He sees it as the reasonable reaction of a Roman governor concerned with an

incident that had all the earmarks of serious insurrection. Pilate's repressive measures resulted in swift execution for several ringleaders, without the assistance of forces under command of the Syrian governor, L. Vitellius, nominally Pilate's superior when the incident occurred.

But when the Samaritans lodged a formal protest, Vitellius was obliged to relieve Pilate of his duties, and instruct him to return to Rome to answer the charges before Tiberius himself. That journey and its outcome are unrecorded; at that point the Pilate of history disappears and the Pilate of legend appears. It's also at that time of transition that the two books under review part company; readers may continue the investigation with Ann Wroe's account of Pilate's mysterious and tragic "second career." But before we turn to that, it is necessary to review briefly what the available sources relate about the events surrounding what Bishop Fulton J. Sheen designated long ago "the most famous trial in the history of the world."

Pilate and the Arrest of Jesus:

No matter how "weak" the Pilate of the Gospels may seem to be, or how he may appear to look for "wiggle-room" during the trial of Jesus, the responsibility for the execution lies squarely with him, and in equal measure, with the Jewish hierarchy in Jerusalem whose concern brought the Nazarene to the governor's tribunal. Paul Maier (1979) is only one of several ancient historians concerned that the "whitewashing" brush not be used to absolve the Temple authorities in the death of Jesus. Whether they feared that the Jesus movement had threatened their authority or whether they were convinced that Jesus was a religious fraud or whether they simply feared a revolt in Jerusalem during that Passover, they initiated the proceedings.

Pilate's role was crucial, but it did not extend to complicity in the arrest of Jesus as both Bond (165-7; 197) and Wroe (212) are willing to accept on the basis of *John* 18:3-13. Indeed, John's use of Greek military terms with exact Latin military equivalents (e.g. *speira* = *cohors*, *chiliarchos* = *tribunus*) has led several scholars, particularly several ancient historians (McGing, 1991: 436; Millar, 1990: 370), to posit a Roman-Jewish force jointly taking Jesus into custody. Some

years ago in this journal I argued against just such a scenario (MacAdam, 1995: 155-158).

In that article I demonstrated that the Hellenistic terms for military ranks and units had passed into the terminology of “local” (i.e. Near Eastern) armies such as that of the Nabataeans—and that both the Herodian army and the forces at the disposal of the Temple authorities in Jerusalem would also use the same standard military terms. The context of that article was the difficulty Raymond Brown had in rejecting the idea of Pilate’s complicity in Jesus’ arrest—see his extensive discussion of this (Brown, 1994: 237-310)—when it is clear that had Roman forces been utilized, Jesus would have been taken directly to Pilate, not (as in John and Mark, independently), to the Jewish authorities. But there is more to it than that.

In my argument, I drew attention to an important portion of an article by Otto Betz (1982: 613-4), in which he utilized the Gospel of Mark’s account (Mk 14: 43-52) of the arrest as the most ancient, and the most reliable source. What Betz said is worth reproducing:

.. Jesus von einer Schar primitiv bewaffneter Männer im Garten Gethsemane verhaftet (Mk 14: 43-51); da sie von den Hohenpriestern, Schriftgelehrten, und Ältesten beauftragt war, handelte es sich wohl um die Tempelpolizei. Eine Beteiligung römischer Soldaten is nicht angedeutet ... Das Eingreifen der jüdischen Behörde galt nur der Verhaftung Jesu (Betz, 1982: 613)

Betz’ conclusion, “The intervention of the Jewish authorities on their own led to the apprehension of Jesus,” which I emphasized in the quote, is also clearly implied by Josephus in a crucial part of his *Testimonium Flavianum* (*Ant.* 18.3.3): “Pilate, because of an accusation put forward by the chief men (*hoi protoi andres*) among us [i.e. the Jewish community], condemned him [Jesus] to the cross” (on this see Meier, 1990: 84). Such a statement by a first-century Jew must be given its due; it is as striking in its implication of the Jewish hierarchy in the execution of Jesus as is the Apostles’ Creed—some two centuries later—remarkable for stressing that the death of Jesus

was totally the responsibility of the Roman governor of Judaea: i.e. *sub Pontio Pilato passus*.

What Betz did not address is the terminology of John's account (noted above), which is precisely what lies behind the difficulties encountered by modern commentators on the Passion narratives. Only now do we have a thorough study of that (Brown, 2001), which I hope will lay to rest the entire question of Roman involvement in Jesus' arrest: "Rather the cohort and tribune of Jn 18:12, along with the 'assistants' (*hypêretai*), form part or all of a Jewish militarized police force of the Temple under the high priest ... They are set up on the Roman pattern, as an inheritance from the army of Herod the Great, and before him from the Maccabean army, and take their names from the normal Greek translations of Latin terminology." It is now possible to move on to the trial itself.

Pilate and the Trial of Jesus:

From his sumptuous palace overlooking the sea, and the wealthy city spawned by Herod's indulgent benefactions and Rome's *imperium*, Pilate administered the fractious province. And from there he left for his Passover rendezvous with Jesus of Nazareth in Jerusalem. It is there, in his other Herodian-built *praetorium*, that we are more familiar with the best-known Roman from all of that culture's long imperial history. There is a parallel to Pilate's "accidental fame" a century before this in the otherwise obscure career of the Capuan *lanista* Lentulus Batiatus, from whose gladiatorial training school Spartacus escaped with others to begin his notorious but ultimately doomed Slave War against Rome (73-71 B.C.--on that see Shaw, 2001).

We know only from Mark's Gospel (15:7) that Pilate had at some time prior to the arrest of Jesus imprisoned men "who had committed murder in the (not a) insurrection" (*hé stasis*)--the Vulgate's *qui in seditione fecerat homicidium* better expresses the gravity of the situation. We are not told where or when the insurrection occurred, though it is probable that Mark refers to a recent event within or near Jerusalem. The use of the definite article with *stasis* implies that Mark's source was close enough in time to the event that his (not Mark's) audience would understand which insurrection he meant.

Imprisoned with those rebels was a certain Barabbas, who might or might not have been involved in the otherwise unrecorded *sedition* near Passover. That is the background against which the Gospels set the arrest of Jesus and his subsequent “hearing” by the High Priest and some members of the Sanhedrin. At that point, Josephus (*Ant.* 18. 3.3), the four Gospels, and a passage in Cornelius Tacitus’ *Annals* (15.44), all focus on the central--indeed, the determinative--role of Pilate in the subsequent execution of Jesus of Galilee c. AD 30.

What is missing about the trial of Jesus--from the four Gospel accounts, from Josephus, and even from Tacitus’ brief reference in *Annals* (15:44) is the charge. Surely, because of the penalty which ensued, it was *sedition*. It is clear why the Evangelists as well as Josephus would want to downplay that charge. Neither Christians nor Jews wished to call attention to themselves as enemies of the Roman order, particularly in the aftermath of the Jewish War, the single most destructive civil disorder of the first century A.D.

What is oddest is that Tacitus doesn’t seem to be aware of the reason for Jesus’ death: *per [praefectum] Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat* (“had been executed by the prefect Pontius Pilate”)--on the passage see especially Meier, 1991, 89-91. Given its context in Tacitus’ story of the Neronian persecution of the Christians of Rome for the fire of July, A.D. 64, and his own stated disgust with the new religious sect, it could be argued that he expects readers to assume that *Christus* was executed for the very same reason (i.e treason) that the Christians of Rome were later put to death.

It is also plausible that Tacitus, earlier in the *Annals*, had referred to Pilate and Jesus, and specified there the sentence that Pilate had rendered. The notorious *lacuna* in the only manuscript of the *Annals* occurs precisely where Tacitus (Bk 6) recounted events between spring, 29 and the execution of Sejanus in October, 31. No one has stated the case better on that point than John Meier: “The most likely year for the trial and death of Jesus (A.D. 30) is not covered in our present manuscripts of the *Annals* (Meier, 1991: 89). Meier then goes on to assess the Tacitean passage in a manner that Wroe (who gives it little attention) might appreciate: “There is a great historical irony [here]; it is the only time in ancient pagan literature that Pontius Pilate is mentioned by name--[but only] as a way of specifying who Christ

was. Pilate's fate in the Christian creeds is already foreshadowed in a pagan historian" (*ibid*, 99).

Pilate's decision to execute Jesus for treason represented an enormous problem for the evangelists, as well as for Josephus. That the verdict was *seditio* is confirmed by the *titulus* on the cross: *Rex Iudaeorum* can only refer to Pilate's belief (mistaken or not) that Jesus made claim to earthly kingship. Josephus' reference to an "accusation" (*endeixis*), without specification, may mean that in the original version of the *Testimonium* it was specified, and that later Christian copyists, understandably concerned, had excised it. That term is not used in any of the Gospels; *katêgoria* ("charge") is what Jn 18:29 uses, and Mk 15.3, Mt 27:12 and Lk 23.2 use verbal forms of that same word. But nowhere in those four accounts of the trial is Pilate's charge stated before Jesus is formally sentenced.

Tacitus' annoyingly oblique comment, that by Pilate's sentence Jesus *supplicio adfectus erat* ("had suffered the extreme penalty," i.e. a death sentence = crucifixion) simply begs the same question that Josephus does in stating that Pilate "condemned him [Jesus] to the cross" (*staurô epitimêkotos*). Neither statement reveals *why*. Bond (175-6) believes that the text of Josephus as we have it omits and original reference to a "disturbance" (*thorubos*) of some kind. Only the Gospels imbue the outcome of the trial with further drama by introducing Barabbas as Pilate's Passover "alternative choice." Wroe (247-251) makes much of this, and well she should—the Paschal pardoning scene has become the *leitmotif* in all representations of Pilate's role at this trial: he allowed "the crowd" to decide which of two accused should go free, and which of them should die.

Whether what the Gospels refer to as "a custom" at Passover in Jerusalem was a reality recognized by the Roman governors has never been successfully resolved. The late Raymond Brown (1994: 807-820), in his exemplary thorough review of the Barabbas incident, was able to offer in the end no more than a *non liquet*. But importantly, he at least underscored a subtext of the problem: *if* a Passover pardon custom existed, were there limitations on how it could be applied?: "Unfortunately, the evangelists are not precise about Barabbas: Is he in prison because he has not yet been tried, or because he has been

tried and is awaiting sentence, or [lastly] because he's been sentenced and is awaiting execution?" (*ibid*, 814).

The other side of that coin is obvious: if the custom did not exist, how explain a Gospel tradition independently attested in the Synoptics and John? It is especially unfortunate that the Barabbas episode is missing from the opening passage of the *Gospel of Peter* (c. A.D. 200); the first fragment begins with Pilate's handwashing. What remains is so garbled (see the literal translation in Appendix I of Brown, 1994: 1317-49 at 1318-21) that it's impossible to know whether a "formal" verdict and sentencing were originally included. What seems clear from the canonical Gospels is that Barabbas in a very real sense was Pilate's prisoner, and Jesus the Sanhedrin's--i.e. that Pilate had more discretion in the case of Barabbas than he did with a prisoner already sentenced by a religious court and transferred to his jurisdiction for a final disposition.

Surely Pilate would not have released a convicted criminal on *any* occasion unless exculpatory evidence compelled him to do so. It is possible that Barabbas had been jailed pending trial for *alleged* involvement in "the *stasis*" mentioned by Mark (above); it is clear from Mark's account that Barabbas "was then in custody with those who had committed murder in the insurrection." Mark's noncommittal, even circumstantial, account is given more definition (though more *veracity* is questionable) by the other evangelists, whose accounts increasingly incriminate Barabbas: in Mt. 27:16 he is "notorious;" in Lk 23:19 he is a "killer."

In Jn 18:40 Barabbas is a "bandit," and there is no mention of his connection with an insurrection or riot. In a loosely parallel account in Acts 3:14, though "Barabbas" is not named, Peter accuses the Jews of Jerusalem of rejecting "the holy and just [Jesus], and requesting [of Pilate] that a killer be released to you." Since we have no testimony from a non-Christian source such as Josephus, it is impossible to judge the veracity of these accounts. Barabbas was released at Pilate's order; Jesus (and two unnamed "bandits") were executed. That may be the simple historical truth of it, but from the time it occurred until now it has served *theology* very well.

Pilate in the Cinema:

It has also served the cinema industry by providing those who make movies—from the silent film era (e.g. *From the Manger to the Cross*, 1913) through recent cinematic epics and television specials (the latest being CBS TV's (U.S.A.) miniseries *Jesus*, 2000)—with plenty of audience attraction. For general surveys of all but the latest of these, see (e.g.) Tatum (1997), Anker (2000) and—perhaps surprisingly, a favourable review of *Jesus* by L.T. Johnson (2000). In all such books, however, Pilate plays a minor role and in some, surprisingly, he doesn't rate a passing mention or an index entry. Cinema, according to one recent study (Goodacre, 2000), might even enable NT scholars to better understand, if not to unravel all the mysteries of, The Synoptic Problem. Perhaps a similar approach can help us gain some insight about Pilate through the same medium.

Unfortunately Wroe (38-39) pays no attention to cinema Pilates who most convincingly bring this elusive shadow-figure into sharper focus. Two come immediately to mind: Arthur Kennedy's toga-wearing, incisive civil administrator (at the beginning of *Barabbas*, 1962), and Rod Steiger's tunic-and-breastplate clad military commander (in *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1977). Instead of Kennedy's blunt, in-your-face, cut-to-the-chase Pilate, or Steiger's edgy, weary and manipulative Pilate, Wroe showcases Basil Rathbone's ascetic existentialist (in *The Last Days of Pompeii*, 1935) and David Bowie's horse-loving and chatty aesthete (in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, 1989). As if the latter parody weren't enough, Wroe treats us to her own snigger at the simpering, lisping Pilate who can't quite "get it right" in the over-rated fantasy *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979), compared to which the malevolently crooning governor of *Jesus Christ: Superstar* (1973) seems little more than a moody, unimaginative bureaucrat.

The documentary sub-genre of film making has not served Pilate well. The American Public Broadcasting Service (PBS TV) special of *From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians* (1998), a four part four hour series examining the origins of Christianity from the Nativity through the fourth century, had very little to say about Pilate. At one place he is mentioned with regard to "several episodes recorded by Josephus

where eschatological prophets emerge, and Pilate has no hesitation in eliminating them.” What those “episodes” were is not discussed, and we are left with the impression that Jesus’ arrest, following the synoptic accounts of the Temple Cleansing, must have something to do with Jewish priestly fears of Pilate’s propensity for “muscular crowd control.” The trial itself is not examined and Pilate remains “an effective and fairly ruthless administrator.”

Pilate as Symbol:

Wroe does no better by characterizing Pilate as “that strange amalgam of human struggling and human failing” (xii), an Everyman to whom we can relate and upon whom we can project our aspirations and our imperfections: “The Pontius Pilate we think we know is a mixture of dozens of invented men, each symbolic of something: the State facing the individual, the pagan world opposing the Christian one, skepticism versus truth, ourselves facing God. He represents either [mankind’s] free will, or his hopelessness before fate, or his struggle to distinguish good from evil, or the tyranny of hard choices” (xiv).

This won’t do. Even if we can’t recreate the person behind the shadows, we can at least be aware that as *praefectus Iudaeae* Pilate exercised *ius gladii*, the power of execution, within his province—how many of us know anyone in authority today with the same deadly, individualized and institutionalized capacity to sit in judgment of and then to condemn to death any person accused of a capital crime? There may have been, in the past 2,000 years, colonial governors of one imperial power or another who had to hold assizes in situations similar to that of Pilate regarding the fate of Jesus.

Wroe makes a valiant attempt to find such a parallel in India under British imperial rule: “Gandhi was tried and convicted [1925] on a charge of sedition. It was the same charge on which Pilate had tried and convicted Christ” (88). For obvious reasons Wroe abandons the analogy there: Gandhi was jailed and later released; he did not face his martyrdom for another 23 years and then it came not as the judicial decision of an imperial bureaucrat, but at the hands of a dissident native of his own country.

In the end, the parallels we wish to find, governors who made a judgment as momentous as that of Pilate's, remain elusive. They do so because their decisions had no consequences beyond expedient removals of troublesome individuals. Thus we remember nothing about them, not because their cases were less important but because they received less notice in the sources available to us and the persons whom they sentenced to death did not become in time the focus of a major political or religious movement which gave the judge, and the condemned, an eternalized interlocking, symbiotic relationship.

Pilate in the Imagination:

The Pilate of Philo Judaeus, Josephus and the Evangelists can be examined within the bounds of critical, historical analysis and no more. Helen Bond recognizes those limitations and her study ends where Pilate's career ends--with his recall to Rome. Wroe allows us to step beyond those limits and to explore a Pilate of imagination, even though she is fully aware that in doing so it opens her study to the criticism--even scorn--of those who consider such adventure into myth and marvel as fanciful at best and ludicrous at worst.

That has not deterred any who, over the past twenty centuries, have sought to give Pilate a presence outside the Gospels and their related historical sources. Vivid imaginations have done their best to fill in all the *lacunae*. No one, including Wroe, has summarized better the plethora of lurid legends and morbid tales about Pilate than ancient historian Paul Maier:

[He] has had an unusually bad press. The most terrifying--and certainly imaginative--punishments were invented for him: torture, insanity, exile, compulsive handwashing, suicide, drowning, decapitation, being swallowed by the earth, and even that ancient punishment for parricide--being sewn up in an oxhide with a cock, a viper and a monkey, and pitched into a river. Medieval legends would add tales of his restless corpse, accompanied by squadrons of demons, disrupting localities from France to Switzerland, causing storms, earthquakes, and other havoc (Maier, 1997: 152-153).

No period in human history produced more pious Pilate fiction than the European Middle Ages, and Wroe's book serves up a generous helping of Pontius Pilate as we can know him through miracle dramas and passion plays, mystery-steeped folktales, legends and myths. In them we can clearly see the prejudices, superstitions and sometimes brutal distortions of Christian ethics which rural folk invented as a pious pastime aimed at mass audiences with little or no education and thus a tenuous grasp of theology, history, or church doctrine. The "whitewashing" of Pilate in the plays designed around an Easter pageant aren't based on any historical sources outside the Gospels.

The Oberammergau Passion Play is perhaps the best-known, and to date the most controversial, of those medieval costume-dramas—but oddly it receives not a mention in Wroe's *Pontius Pilate*. Since 1634 the Bavarian villagers have been re-enacting the last days in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and the anti-Jewish attitude of the play has survived numerous revisions. As a recent, critical account (Shapiro, 2000: 149) notes, "a leading Catholic scholar" complained that even in the 1999 re-write, "Pontius Pilate is whitewashed."

The remark, of course, centres on culpability for the death of Jesus; the "traditional" bias of the Oberammergau production was to place full blame on the Jewish hierarchy and their adherents—which included Jesus' betrayer—and thereby exonerate the Roman governor. Thus it is especially interesting to know the political backgrounds of the cast of the play's jubilee or "tricentennial" production the year after Adolf Hitler came to power:

We do have records of which villagers joined the Nazi party; when we compare these records to the cast list of the 1934 Passion Play, the congruence is extraordinary. Of the 714 who were in the play that year (which includes a large number of children), 152 had joined the Nazi party before May, 1937, the arbitrary cutoff date used by the Allies after the war to define [who were] 'pure Nazis' (an unspecified number had joined after that date). Of the leading performers, Jesus ... along with eight of his twelve apostles were members of the Nazi party. So, too, was the Virgin Mary. Ironically only

Judas ... is known to have been 'a strong anti-Nazi'
(Shapiro, 2000: 149).

If Wroe cannot draw our attention to cinematic portraits less extreme or bizarre than those she chose to note (above), she could illustrate Pilate through representations of him that hang or stand in every Roman Catholic sanctuary in the world. The first of the 14 "Stations of the Cross" depicts one scene, Jesus condemned to death by Pilate, etched into the minds of all the faithful who have gazed upon it (in some likeness or other) since the European Middle Ages. To Wroe's credit she does describe in some detail (173-74) one such sculpted (stone) bas relief in London's Roman Catholic Westminster Cathedral. But she doesn't follow through on that, i.e. estimating how many thousands of such scenes exist throughout the world today: Pilate enthroned on a *sella curulis* (in Greek, *bēma*), the "judgment seat" from which, in a Roman tribunal, the final decision in a case must come, and the figure of Jesus about to be sentenced before his execution. From Albania to Zimbabwe, from Anchorage to Zagreb, that solemn setting is given its expression in wood, stone, plaster, and paint. Pilate is a truly global personality--far better known today than either *imperator*, Augustus or Tiberius, of Jesus' lifetime.

If Pilate has found expression in various apocryphal works of antiquity, in dramas and pageants of medieval Europe, and in church decorative art, he has not fared so well in other literature. There have been numerous novels, from the Rev. J.H. Ingraham's Victorian biblical romance *The Prince of the House of David* (1888) to Michael Moorcock's science-fiction fantasy *Behold the Man* (1975) portraying Pilate in judgment; none has done nearly as well as Anatole France did in his short story, "Le Procureur de Judée" (1892), which is set instead during Pilate's enforced exile (as the author imagined it) on the island of Sicily--with his only daughter in attendance.

Nor has poetry taken up his cause with much enthusiasm. Wroe's excerpt (172) from David Gascoyne's fine poem "Ecce Homo" (the full text can be found in Atwan & Wieder, 1993: 192-194), unfortunately, is not about Pilate but the consequences of the crucifixion; there is not another poem in that collection which focuses on the role of the Pilate of the Passion. Nor is there anything in another useful collection of poems based on the text of the four

Gospels (Curzon, 1995). A collection of 13 verse meditations on Pilate (LeBal, 1995) is strange enough without the book's bizarre dedication "à Mikhail Gorbatchev."

Pilate's Wife:

Pilate's wife does better. We are fortunate now to have, some three-quarters of a century after it was first written, a novel by "H.D." (Doolittle, 2000) in which the legend of Veronica is given a new and different significance. But that is to enter the world of revisionist literature. Far more direct and subtle is a poem about Pilate's wife, worth reproducing here because it introduces (as it were) the shadow behind the shadow of Pontius Pilate on that first Good Friday:

Pilate's Wife

(Matthew 27:19)

I don't know who that man is
but I know when I saw him
my migraine lifted off
like a feather, and some black birds
spelled a message on the air
of my dream, and if you don't
believe in omens, and don't
tell me you do, I know
you don't, they still are there
and since I'm chained to you,
yes, I repeat, I'm chained
to you, you can at least
obey the birds and listen:
*Have thou nothing to do
with that just man, husband.*

Nina Kossman in
Curzon (1995: 204)

Like Lot's wife of *Genesis*: 19:26, Pilate's wife is not named. But she is given a name--*Claudia Procula*--when Pilate is given a "biography" via the apocryphal literature of later centuries. Wroe attends carefully to the myths and legends of Procula (41-45; 252-257 and *passim*), but somehow missed the poem by Kossman. Whether it was possible for wives to accompany husbands to such minor postings as Judaea is still uncertain, but the length of the terms that some governors endured suggests that spouses were allowed. Surely Pilate would not have wanted her in Jerusalem during such a tense, perhaps dangerous, festival of freedom as Passover. Whatever influence she enjoyed must have been wielded from the security of Herod's palace in Caesaraea. Matthew's anecdote, which also inspired some popular art (e.g. *The Dream of Pilate's Wife*, 18XX), is examined carefully by R.E. Brown (1994: 803-807).

As Wroe notes (43-44) the Proculi at Rome were of equestrian rank and a notable enough clan. That connection, and the attested Proculi among the Latin military families settled since Augustus in the Roman *colonia* of Berytus, are tenuous connections to a name we know only from "romantic" literature of the early Christian period. Yet it is always tantalizing to find archaeological support for the legends, even when no certain connection exists. Such is a chance discovery, made in an ancient cemetery in Beirut in the 1920s, of two gold bracelets, each inscribed in Greek with the name *Klaudia Prokla* (Smith, 1984: 102 referring to Mouterde, 1929). Originally dated to the third or fourth century A.D., the lead sarcophagi and the grave-goods (including the bracelets) found with them are now firmly reassigned to the mid-first century A.D. by *comparanda* from securely dated tomb materials excavated in Roman-era Crete.

Whatever the warp of historical fact and the woof of myth, the fabric of the story of Pilate and his wife's dream have withstood--with much additional embroidery--the past several millennia. Pilate (as Matthew has it) paid no attention to the message from his wife about her dream. The trial of Jesus ended with a guilty verdict and a sentence of death. That is where Wroe might better have examined Pilate as the final authority in a judicial decision involving the penalty of death, for that is precisely where Pilate, or anyone who wields such power, is most certainly not Everyman. Surely Pilate's dilemma, to release or to execute, might have been moderated had he decided instead to

imprison Jesus (as he had Barabbas) and to delay a final decision. That he didn't speaks to the gravity of this case more than it does to his attitude about the message from his wife.

Pilate and Christian Theology:

To paraphrase the mention of the Duke of Wellington above, we remember Pilate because of Jesus of Nazareth, and not the reverse--just as we remember the governors Felix and Festus because of Paul. Beyond the historical aspect of his career, Pilate has also served as a handy foil in the theological debate on the redemptive aspect of Jesus' life. If the birth, ministry and death of Jesus are seen as more than normal combinations of "nature and nurture" to which all humans are subject, then the divine element in his career must include the notion of determinism, a planned manifestation of God's cosmic design.

In that scheme of things, the redemptive death of Jesus had to precede the Resurrection--both as fulfilment of scripture, and the demonstrable action of God in human history. Toward that end, then, the betrayal and execution of Jesus were of central importance--if they did not occur, Jesus would be seen as no more than yet another false messiah. Thus Judas Iscariot, Caiaphas and Pilate, eternally linked in the unending drama of the Passion, assumed the roles with which they are now so closely associated: three personifications of Evil.

Of the three, it is Pilate whom tradition judges most harshly: Judas' suicide served as his atonement, and "the Jews," rather than Caiaphas, received the blame for orchestrating, if not carrying out --the death of Jesus. At least that is how the early church saw it--Eusebius (*HE* 2.7) gleefully reports the tradition that Pilate, as Judas had before him, took his own life in remorse for the part he played in condemning the innocent Jesus to death. But it is Pilate, not Judas or Caiaphas, who serves as the focus of blame and is not, as some would have it, merely a "source of historical documentation and chronology" (Maier, 1996: 349) in the measured sentences of the Nicene Creed.

Yet if the redemptive element is to have merit, it must follow that its theological conclusion be accepted: that neither Judas nor Caiaphas nor Pilate had any other choice than to betray, to condemn and to execute (respectively) Jesus. Thus the evil that those three men did, to

acknowledge a fine Shakespearean line, lives after them --even if it was an absolutely necessary evil. Not all varieties of the early church accepted that, at least not regarding the role of Pilate as deicide. In Egypt's Coptic Church, Pilate's wife Procula is honored as a saint and in the Ethiopian Church Pilate is counted among the sanctified.

That might amuse a *Pilatus redivivus*, could he be brought back to life in order to review the nearly twenty centuries during which his decision regarding a particular set of circumstances brought an unsuspected immortality to his name. Whether he would be pleased to know that he is to some an object of derision and hatred and yet to others an intercessor between man and God we can only speculate. It may be worth reflecting here on what one modern scholar has written about the role of "luck" in human existence, i.e. how much of what we consider to be "good" or "bad" luck is owed to nature or nurture or some indefinable combination of both, or whether there are other factors involved:

I shall use the word "luck" in a not strictly defined but, I hope, perfectly intelligible way, closely related to the way in which the Greeks themselves spoke of *tuchê*. I do not mean to imply that the events in question are random or uncaused. What happens to a person by luck will be just what does not happen through his or her own agency, what just happens to him, as opposed to what he does or makes... I begin this book from a position I believe to be common ... That I am an agent, but also a plant; that much that I did not make goes toward making me whatever I shall be praised or blamed for being; that I must constantly choose among competing and apparently incommensurable goods and that circumstances may force me to a position in which I cannot help being false to some thing or doing some wrong; that an event that simply happens to me may, without my consent, alter my life... (Nussbaum, 1986: 3; 5)

But before we let Pilate return to that immortality he did or did not earn, we may wonder if by chance he came upon either of the books

reviewed here what his reaction would be. Perhaps the closing thoughts of each author would capture his attention, since each is, in its own way, conscious of the fact that Pilate's judgment of the case before him on that first Good Friday was just the beginning of an adventure through which he continues to live in our imagination. Helen Bond concludes her closely argued, academic volume thus:

[I]nterpretations of Pilate and his role as the judge of Jesus of Nazareth did not end with the first century, or even apocryphal or medieval literature ... even twentieth-century works on Pilate are interpretations, designed both to speak to their own times and situations and influenced by them. This is the case not only when the works come out of Stalinist Russia, post-war Germany, or the European Union of the late 1990s, but out of any social, political or economic situation. Even popular imagination, focusing on Romans in search of truth, the judge washing his hands, or the indecisive governor, contributes to many different "Pilates of interpretation" of our own time (Bond, 1998: 207).

Ann Wroe summarizes her iconoclastic, non-academic study thus:

He was the essence of evil or the essence of goodness: God's rejecter or God's embracer. These opposing legends had taken on a life of their own. Yet they had both sprung, however far back, from a civil servant's moment of uncertainty. There had been potential in Pilate at that moment for darkness or light far beyond a routine experience of a Roman prefect. Even he seemed to sense it. The tiny seed had lodged within his heart or his mind, suggesting infinite possibilities. He could take untraveled roads, open hidden doors, escape the bounds of earth and flesh, exceed himself. Or he could stay as he was: shrug, scratch his ear, write another memorandum.

He stayed as he was. As most of us do (Wroe, 1999: 380).

One of the Gospels gives Pilate a shadowy afterglow; Matthew alone (Mt 27:62-66) relates that a delegation of “chief priests and Pharisees” came to Pilate on Holy Saturday to petition that they be allowed to put a guard at the tomb of Jesus. As the *NEB* translates it:

“You may have your guard,” said Pilate; “go and make the grave secure as best as you can.” So they went and made the grave secure; they sealed the stone, and left the guard in charge.

His last order may be taken as an attempt to keep the genie in the bottle. It was unsuccessful, as Matthew goes on to testify. Nor has anyone so far been very successful at keeping Pilate within the bounds of history. His spirit still haunts the rivers and lakes and mountains of France, Switzerland, Germany and Italy. Yet no one, to my knowledge, has ever seen his shade, or felt his presence—in any form or shape—within the modern confines of what had been for one decade a small piece of territory in which he held absolute power. Perhaps that, and not the last lines of Anatole France’s fine tale, is the final irony of the Pilate saga, blending elements of history and mystery far beyond the limits of Koestler’s “*Ecce Homo* motive.”

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Abbreviations

ANRW = *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

JSOT = *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

NEB = *New English Bible*

OCD³ = *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd edition)

PIR = *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*

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