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Roman and Jewish Collaboration: The Gospel of John's trial narrative

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ABSTRACT

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In this paper, I will argue that John's trial narrative shows a historical depiction of Jewish and Roman authorities at the time in which Jesus lived. John's narrative is a dramatically structured text. Its high Christology can seem to be an impediment to historical research. However, when researching the historical accounts from the first century involving Roman and Jewish authorities, the narrative can be examined from a historical perspective. In John's trial narrative, the relationship between Roman and Jewish authorities involves notions of kingship, foreign imperial influence, and intra-elite power relations that were reminiscent of the time at which Jesus lived. By setting aside historical reconstructions of Jesus and giving Roman and Jewish authorities an equal treatment, John's trial narrative can be viewed as historically reliable.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. An Introduction to John's Political Trial Narrative.....	1
2. New Criticism: Literary and Historical Research	6
3. A History of Roman Intervention	11
Failure of non-intervention and increase in social unrest.....	12
Temple Activities: Roman control and dishonor	19
Annas, John's Gospel and The Great Sanhedrin?	22
4. Actors in John's Trial Narrative	28
The Political Influence of Annas and Caiphas.....	28
What accusation do you bring against this man.....	32
Pontius Pilate and the Sources.....	37
5. John's Arrest Narrative	42
6. John's Political Trial Narrative.....	46
Are You the King of the Jews?	46
The notion and threat of kingship.....	51
No Friend of the Emperor.....	56
Conclusion.....	60
Bibliography.....	65

CHAPTER ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO JOHN'S POLITICAL TRIAL NARRATIVE

Historical scholarship into the time at which Jesus lived has given the academy many portraits that have involved sound logical reasoning and at other times fantasy. The industry of historical Jesus scholars such as E.P Sanders, N.T. Wright, Marcus Borg, William Herzog, John Dominic Crossan, Burton Mack, and Richard Horsley, to name a few, continue to churn out works at a rapid pace to feed the hungry masses' quest for the real Jesus. The arguments in these works are concerned with placing Jesus in his "correct" or "plausible" historical context. These scholars put forth arguments that do not belong to the kerygmatic discourses of the First and Second waves of historical Jesus scholarship, but involve a third wave relying on social-scientific study, and with it the flood gates have been opened. Your humble narrator is very much a product of this third wave. Debates over the eschatological or egalitarian identity of Jesus have been poured out onto pages with no end in sight for the reader. The Jewish Jesus is placed alongside the revolutionary Jesus and the teacher of wisdom Jesus. Along with questions about how the identity of Jesus was affected by his social environment come methodological questions involving positivist and interpretivist approaches and criticisms leaving readers baffled. While the above-mentioned scholars are all preeminent in their field and their works are enlightening for anyone wanting to gain knowledge about Jesus, they all have three things in common; they are all white, male, and focus on Jesus.

The Gospel trial narratives are given their very own special chapter in most historical reconstructions of Jesus. For example, “Jesus’ last week,”¹ “What is truth? The Show Trial in Jerusalem,”² and “The Charming Pontius Pilate,”³ are just a few. Some scholars, such as Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan even combined their efforts to uncover what really happened to Jesus in their book “*The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus’s Final Week in Jerusalem*.”⁴ In this work, the chapters are titled “Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.” If a person is looking for a good discussion about the trial of Jesus any of these books would be a good start, however, historical controls should not be abandoned for the sake of clarity about the trial of Jesus; a clarity that does not historically exist. All we know about the trial of Jesus historically is that Jesus was crucified by the order of Pontius Pilate. Any investigation into the Gospel passion narratives and traditions requires heavy lifting and inter-textuality at an in-depth and exhausting level. Gospel reconstructions of the trial of Jesus usually give Mark priority over Matthew and Luke, and John’s narrative is an afterthought because of its high Christology and developed sense of dramatic structure. It would seem evident that the route to understanding the trial of Jesus would be better undertaken by studying the historical groups and institutions that processed him and not a dead-end quest for Jesus himself.

¹ Sanders, E. P. *The historical figure of Jesus*. New York: Penguin, 1996. Print. 249-274.

² Herzog, William R. 2015. *Prophet and Teacher*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. Print. 215-227.

³ Crossan, John Dominic. *Jesus: a revolutionary biography*. New York, NY: Harper One, 2009. Print. 153-158.

⁴ Borg, Marcus J., and John Dominic. Crossan. *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach about Jesus’s Final Days in Jerusalem*. SPCK, 2008.

Historical reconstructions of the trial of Jesus do not give enough information about the historical institutions, figures, and social groups that all play a role in the trial. For example, the figure of Pontius Pilate is found only when discussing the trial of Jesus; his daily activities, official position, and ideology are rarely discussed apart from his interaction with Jesus and a mentioning of Josephus. This makes sense if one considers parts of John's trial narrative a work of "Christian propaganda" as E.P. Sanders does in *The Historical Figure of Jesus*.⁵ Perhaps the trial doesn't put forth much historical evidence because it is simply "prophecy historicized" as William Herzog contends.⁶ Other figures such as Caiaphas and Annas are given only minor treatments and their official capacity are given a page's worth of space. Issues of Roman and Jewish jurisdiction, the day-to-day activities of their institutions and their historical relationship to one another become second to how they are attached to Jesus. A person should consider when reading a historical reconstruction of Jesus how limited a role his environment is actually given. If social-scientific inquiry into the life of Jesus depends greatly on how he was affected by his environment, it would seem prudent to discuss this environment in great detail, but it is easier to convince readers that Jesus was an anti-establishment figure than to argue that he was a reformer (followed by an at length discussion on the development of Pharisaic Judaism). It is easier to present Jesus as a Zen master teaching foreign philosophies than it is to discuss at length how Hellenization effected the territory of Galilee. It is easier to discuss how John's trial narrative birthed anti-Semitism, without

⁵ Sanders, 274.

⁶ Herzog, 215. Herzog examines how the Gospel trial narratives seized upon prophetic texts from the Hebrew Bible to fashion a framework for the death of Jesus as fulfillment of prophecy. In this manner, the trial narratives may be "prophecy historicized." This is very similar to Raymond Brown's "History Remembered" in his work *The Death of the Messiah: from Gethsemane to the Grave: a Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*. Yale University Press, 2010.

ever discussing the relationship between Jewish and Roman authorities. It's easier to discuss "Judaism," than to explain "Judaisms" that existed in the first century. My point is that when Jesus is discussed, his environment becomes secondary in many historical reconstructions.

John's trial narrative uniquely presents the environment of Jesus by pushing the relationship between Jewish and Roman authorities to the front of the narrative. In its political presentation, John's narrative shows back and forth exchanges between the Jewish elite and Pilate bartering for the life of Jesus. Noted for its dramatic structure and focus on kingship, the narrative is far more developed than the Synoptic accounts as seen here:

1. 18:28–32 Outside the Praetorium
2. 18:32–38a Inside (Kingship of Jesus)
3. 18:38b–40 Outside (Not guilty– choice – Barnabas + Jesus)
4. 19:1–3 Inside (scourge Jesus / crown of thorns / royal vestments)
5. 19:4–8 Outside (not guilty/ behold the man)
6. 19:9–11 Inside (Question about origins)
7. 19:13–16 Pilate delivers Jesus to crucifixion.

This structure clearly shows the hand of a gifted writer who uses the dialogue between Pilate and Jesus as an intensification of the event. If someone were to search for the historical Jesus within John's trial narrative they would be hard pressed to find any new evidence.

Though there have been works done on the historicity of John's Gospel such as C.H. Dodd's *The Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*⁷, and more recently Craig L.

⁷ Dodd, C. H. *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*. University Press, 1979.

Blomberg's *Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*⁸ and Richard Bauckham's 2007 work, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*⁹, these works combine literary criticism with discussions around Johannine theology and John's connection to the Synoptics, but they do not give full length discussions on the historical environment at the time in which Jesus lived. It is my wish to focus on the political presentation of John's trial and give the environment of Jesus its due consideration. John's trial narrative presents the reader with a historically accurate picture of the relationship between Jewish and Roman authorities at the time in which Jesus lived. By discussing a history of Roman intervention into Jewish affairs, intervention into Temple activities, and an in-depth look at the figures of Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate, I will clearly show how John's trial narrative is historically reliable in its depiction of the relationship between Jewish and Roman authorities. Furthermore, I will note how issues of kingship and imperial foreign influence in John's trial narrative appear to have been real historical problems Jewish and Roman authorities would have encountered.

⁸ Blomberg, Craig L. *Historical reliability of John's gospel: issues and commentary*. Intervarsity Press, 2011. Use a standard citation style throughout your footnotes. (i.e., no caps)

⁹ Bauckham, Richard. *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John*. Baker Academic, 2008.

CHAPTER TWO

NEW HISTORICISM: LITERARY AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH

Historical research that has been done on the Gospel of John has always been reliant on the three plus one model of scholarship, meaning there is Mark, Matthew, Luke, and then, at some later period, John. The inevitable result of such scholarship is to isolate John from the Synoptic texts in favor of a de-historicization of John's narrative and bio-optic of Jesus. This separation is always carried out with the belief that John's high Christology is a hindrance to most historical research. Undoubtedly, John's presentation of the life of Jesus is a theological one, however, this does not discount its viability for historical research. If theologically-charged narratives were the basis for considering the historicity of a Biblical text, there would be no historical research, period. Furthermore, despite a high Christology, John's narrative is very much in line with the Synoptics theologically. As the New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson wrote, "Just as in the Synoptics, the pattern of Christ is to be the pattern of Christian discipleship."¹⁰

Other scholars promote the John plus Mark hypothesis that states John had use or knowledge of parts of Mark and not Matthew and Luke.¹¹ For example, both John (after

¹⁰ Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The real Jesus: the misguided quest for the historical Jesus and the truth of the traditional Gospels*. San Francisco: Harper, San Francisco, 1997. Print. 157.

¹¹ Bauckham, Richard. "John for Readers of Mark." Pages 147-171. 1998a. Bauckham considers John's spiritualization of Mark and considers John possibly expanding not on original material, but on Mark's tradition of Jesus. However, this is highly disputed by other scholars.

the prologue) and Mark begin with the ministry of John the Baptist and end with the Passion, death, resurrection, and appearance narratives.¹² Both Mark and John have similar Passion accounts that begin with an acclaimed entry to Jerusalem, a Last Supper, prayer and arrest in the garden, two trials (a Jewish and a Roman trial), the crucifixion and death, the resurrection, and, finally, appearance to women. Unfortunately, these are merely textual “similarities” and despite numerous examples there is no direct language to point to that would imply John had use of Mark.

John’s Gospel continues to be fruitful for biblical scholarship because, despite its high theology, it contains many unique symbolic, Jewish, geographic, topographic details to its narrative. For example, John goes out of his way to explain Jewish customs to a gentile audience. He includes where people are from, such as John 1:44 “Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida.” He records the exact distances and miles of locations such as “Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem” (John 11:18) and “there is a well in Synchar” (John 4:4). Most important for my study, John has detailed knowledge of Pilate’s Praetorium and the layout of the Jerusalem Temple (John 10:22-23). He mentions that Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas the former High Priest and gives the only narrative account of Jesus before him. These details could be completely fabricated as some scholars have concluded. However, why bother mentioning that after appearing to his disciples they “came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off” (John 21:8)? What is the narrative function of telling the audience that the town of Bethany was

¹² Anderson, Paul N., Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher. *John, Jesus, and history*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016. 44.

two miles near Jerusalem (John 11:18). How did John know that Judas the son of Simon was from Kerioth in Judea? Why narrate that John chose to baptize in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there? Why narrate that after Jesus attended a Festival of the Jews he went up to Jerusalem and by the Sheep Gate there was a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which had five porticos. The attention to detail in John's Gospel continues to draw scholars into his narrative to search for how such details worked their way into a high theological narrative.¹³

In the last few decades, scholars have begun to look at John's gospel from a new-historicism lens that combines studying John's literary presentation mingled with history. In this mode of research, "History is defined as an organized re-presentation of textual traces from the past. History is the practice of representing texts that have themselves already re-presented the past. The intertextuality of the past is the primary referent of the historian's work, not an object known as the past itself."¹⁴ New Historicism frequently attempts to unmask the power relations at work within a given culture."¹⁵ Boyarin states, "Rather than talking about what biblical narrative is or is not, we should be talking about strategies and pragmatics of reading in different cultural moments."¹⁶ By examining the ideological trend of a given text the possibility of understanding their cultural and historical context is possible. For example, the third wave of cultural Jesus studies focuses on the examination of Jesus in his Jewish identity and environment. In what ways

¹³ Who Do My Opponents Say That I Am? : An Investigation of the Accusations Against the Historical Jesus, edited by Scot McKnight, and Joseph B. Modica, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008. 71.

¹⁴ Burnett, Fred. "Historiography." Pages 106-112 in Adam 200.

¹⁵ Anderson, 205. New Historicism tends to disrupt established narratives of certain time periods.

¹⁶ Boyarin, Jonathan. *The ethnography of reading*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. Print. 26. Boyarin points out that our understanding of the writers of biblical narratives often leave out whether they viewed their writing as the literal truth. Therefore, new pragmatic ways of reading a text should be investigated rather than just what the text presents.

was Jesus influenced by his environment and what powers were at work in it? The inherent problem in this mode of research is that we do not possess a direct historical record at the time in which Jesus lived. To conclude that his environment in one way or another affected Jesus requires data that is gathered from several sources spanning decades of the first century. Even then, the conclusions cannot be considered historically accurate. The best a scholar can do is investigate the re-presentation of the situation at the time in which Jesus lived and come away with proximate conclusions.

In this forthcoming study of John's trial narrative, I will show how his re-presentation of the relationship between the Jewish and Roman authorities is historically plausible. I am very much a product of new-historicism that seeks to understand the historical Jesus based on examining the literary re-presentations in the Gospels and studying how the social world of Jesus would have possibly affected him. The question I am not asking in this reconstruction is what does John's trial narrative tell us about Jesus. I am not concerned with whether the Johannine narrative gives a historical picture of Jesus. What I am interested in showing is how John's trial narrative shows a historically accurate picture of the Jewish and Roman authorities at the time in which Jesus lived; how they operated, their relationship, and their shared interests. In other words, I am not doing another open-ended quest for a historical Jesus, but rather, I am doing a quest for the historical Jewish and Roman authorities at the time of Jesus. I will examine John's literary presentation of events and discuss at length how this presentation is historically plausible.

The impressive and well-developed trial narrative found in John's gospel is an ideologically driven text focused primarily on theological statements about Jesus. I will

bracket Johannine theological implications for this study and focus solely on the historical possibilities that exist within John's literary presentation of the relationship between Jewish and Roman authorities. Issues of Johannine theology and questions revolving around a possible Johannine community will not be taken up. My primary interest is not what does the trial narrative tell me about the Johannine community, but how does it display the relationship between Jewish and Roman authorities at the time in which Jesus lived, and whether this relationship is historically plausible. The Johannine narrative is a re-presentation tailored for a specific community while being bound to certain traditions that they would have been given concerning Jesus. When reading the John's trial narrative, we see the theological in friction with the historical. My thesis is that the relationship between the Roman and Jewish authorities in John's narrative is the historical component.

CHAPTER THREE

A HISTORY OF ROMAN INTERVENTION

The relationship between the Jewish and Roman authorities in the first century was shaped by divisive policies which resulted in a slow and steady increase in political and religious unrest. At the time in which Jesus of Nazareth lived, the Jewish people had become accustomed to navigating the political, social, and religious interventions of Rome. It is the period of Jesus' ministry that contained the pre-revolutionary thinking that would set the stage for the Great Revolt. Judging history by recorded acts of violence and intervention by Rome does not give the interpreter any real information other than what the writer alludes to. For example, we are given accounts of military intervention by Pilate, but we are given no reasoning behind his actions or his official capacity as governor of Judea. Judging acts of historical violence is like being given an aerial view of a city, where we can see clusters of buildings and peaks of taller ones, but have no idea what it's like on the street for the ordinary citizen. Therefore, gauging social unrest and acts of violent revolt can only be done within certain time periods for which there is evidence. The makeup of specific groups, ideologies, and politics that lead to violence and social unrest are often extremely unclear.

1. FAILURE OF NON-INTERVENTION AND INCREASE IN SOCIAL UNREST

Contrary to popular scholarship surrounding Empire and colonial studies, it was in Rome's best interest to allow Jewish social, religious, and political structures to act without direct intervention by Rome because Judea as a province had always been a hotbed of social unrest. Historically, the goal of non-intervention by Rome and the ideal of an autonomously governed society by the Jews never became a reality. There are three main reasons for the failure. One reason for this failure is that the strategic importance of Judea as a land link between Egypt and Syria was too profitable to be left in the hands of an unsupervised territory. Indeed, Judea was a territory that had shown a history of revolt and volatile people.¹⁷ A second reason is the problem of reorganizing the Judean territory into a part of the Syrian province by Augustus. As long as Judea had been a client-state ran by a client-king, they did not have to pay imperial taxes. The formation of Judea from a client-state to a province would promote massive taxation of the people.¹⁸ The third reason is the increasing ignorance and insensitivity of Roman governors towards the Jewish populace. Accounts from the time of the death of King Herod in 4BCE record violent upheaval, assassinations, and political brinksmanship that would shape first-

¹⁷ Sicker, Martin. *Between Rome and Jerusalem: 300 Years of Roman-Judaean Relations*. Praeger, 2001. 115. In Chapter 13 "Judea Becomes a Roman Province," Sicker argues that the Jewish elite failed to properly understand how Augustus' decision to appoint governors would not give them more autonomy.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

century Judea. Here is a quotation from a popular assessment of King Herod after his death:

There ruled a ruthless king who was not from the priestly family, a terrible man who knew no shame....He cut off their heads with his sword and interred their corpses in remote places so that none would know where they were buried; and he killed old people and showed no mercy on young ones; they suffered bitterly in their country because of the fear of him; and he inflicted sever punishment on them such as the Egyptians had inflicted upon them; and he punished them for four and thirty years.”¹⁹

As this passages illustrates, at the outset of the first century, the relationship between Roman authorities and the Jewish people was already in a state of violence and revolt. In the proceeding years of Roman rule, attempts would be made to absorb the Jewish elites to keep social unrest at a minimum.

The Historical record reveals violent incidents occurring in small increments and increasing in size and regularity as the first century progressed. Roman intervention into Jewish affairs under the governors of Judea became more severe as the century grew older. It is often taken as an absolute truth that the violent makeup of first century Judea applied to the time of the ministry of Jesus. However, out of all the interpretations and study of John’s gospel and Roman imperialism, one outstanding recorded fact goes unnoticed. How is it that, between the reigns of Herod the Great in 39 BCE -4 BC.E, and during the ministry of Jesus and the reign of Herod Antipas 34.C E – 39 CE., there are

¹⁹ *The Assumption of Moses*6:2-7, In James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 2.

no recorded outbreaks of violence or revolt? Where does the ministry of Jesus fit into the violent makeup of the first century?

Based on the historical record, acts of violence and social unrest occurred before and after the ministry of Jesus and not during. At the death of Herod the Great in 4 BCE there was an outbreak of violence in the provinces. In response to the violence, the Jewish hierarchy sent emissaries to Rome to ask that another King not be appointed²⁰ What they received instead were governors: completely inept, indifferent, and, in many cases, violent. With the placement of governors in Judea, there was a slow and steady increase in violent upheaval beginning with the governor Cumanus (48-52), Felix (52-60) and rapidly increasing by the governorship of Florus (64-66).²¹ The most widespread incident of revolt occurring closest to the ministry of Jesus comes during the reign of Cumanus (48-52); this is approximately 15-20 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. Josephus gives an account at the Passover where after a Roman soldier insults the crowd they appealed to Cumanus:

“But Cumanus fearing the whole population would rush him, sent for reinforcements. When these troops poured into the colonnades, the Jews were panic-stricken and turned and fled from the temple into the city. But so violently did they jam up at the exits that they trampled each other and more than 30,000 were crushed to death. Thus, the feast ended in mourning for the whole nation and bereavement for every household.”²²

²⁰ Josephus, Flavius. *Antiquities*. xvii, 2-3 (304-308).

²¹ Horsley, Richard A., and John S. Hanson. *Bandits, Prophets & Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus*. Trinity Press International. 86.

²² Josephus, Flavius. *The Jewish War*. 2.224-27.

This account though most likely exaggerated (30,000 is a large number), shows an instance of widespread unrest in the years following the ministry of Jesus. We read that there were “troops poured into the colonnades,” that the incident occurred at the Passover, and that the governor Cumanus feared that the whole population would rush him. Events such as this occurred in similar fashion under different governors after the ministry of Jesus. A governor would act without respect for Jewish sensibilities and the population in outrage would revolt.

The time period of Jesus’ ministry should not be considered a time of widespread revolt, but a time of pre-revolutionary thinking. It was time of group formation and ideological formation that would later give birth to full scale revolt by some in the Jewish populace. Pontius Pilate was certainly ruthless as a governor, and his actions mirror that of other governors, but the violent events during his reign occurred in isolated events and did not represent widespread revolutionary actions by the Jewish people. The problem is that history gives us only snapshots of events that sparked outrage that are often viewed from a biased perspective. Governors are judged by history for one or two incidents taken from a period of rule of 2-8 years. During the years of the ministry of Jesus we do not have a record of repeated attempts by the citizenry to appeal to the elites of their day. The lack of direct historical evidence of violent revolt at the time of Jesus does not correlate to a time of peace, just not widespread revolt. Furthermore, in historical accounts of governors and elites we are only given one-sided illustrations of the events being written about.

Compared to more violent periods in the first century, Pilate inherited a rather tranquil state of affairs when he was appointed governor of Judea. As previously stated,

other than after the death of Herod and replacement of Archelaus in Judea, there are no historical records for massive amounts of violence taking place at the time in which Jesus lived. Any study involving the occurrence of violent revolt at the time in which Pilate was governor should be undertaken in periods, with numerous sources gathered from across the first one hundred years of the first century. Often, what occur as events and institutions are described based on what occurs from 44C.E- to the great revolt in 66-73 C.E after the reign of Pilate.

When taken in totality, history gives us 6 incidents about the governorship of Pilate within a 10-year period of his reign. These accounts were written after the fact, and written for the effect of the writer, as is the case with John's trial narrative. When compared to other violent periods within history such as WW1 or WW2, this period of small incidents during the reign of Pilate seems uneventful. In fact, the entire first century of Jewish life is filled with nothing but snapshots of violence and upheaval and rarely and sustained violence between the Jewish state and Rome. Undoubtedly, there was intra-Jewish debate. Some such existed because of Rome, and some existed outside of Rome's influence. But to paint a picture of sustained revolts and violent oppression is overall neither true nor, historical. The portrait of Pilate in John's trial narrative is just one of many examples of first century documents applying their own motives to the man.

History does not give us a sustained record of social unrest, but small incidents scattered over a hundred-year-period. Most scholars attempt to display the Judean populace as seething with anti-Roman fervor that built up to the great revolt. This very well may be true in some cases, such as the formation of radical groups such as the Zealots; however just as many Jewish groups, including pacifist Jews, would have largely

condemned such behavior. Then there would have been messianic groups who wanted to wait until God had given clear direction and action in how to overcome imperial Rome. Differing with this view, other scholars still argue for the “silence equals violence” hypothesis that states the lack of evidence supports a much more violent and interventionist picture of history than what is probably widely available or known to use today. Whether there was widespread revolt or just pre-revolutionary thinking during the ministry of Jesus, history does not show us. The historical record does show a slow progression in social unrest leading to widespread revolt.

Collaboration between Roman and Jewish authorities was the cause of political and social unrest at the time of Jesus’ ministry. The period in which Jesus lived was representative of the fact that the Jewish people had become accustomed to living under an empire and Rome had become good at being an empire. To put this statement in context, the Jewish elite of Jesus’ day and Rome had learned how to remain in power and exert their political influence onto the populace.. With respect to the day- to-day operations of the temple, Rome could not have been less concerned with how it operated on religious grounds as long as it remained on peaceful terms. Rome was not concerned with religious activities and affairs that did not cross over into their domain of power. For example, after Herod’s death in 4 B.C, Rome did away with the Client Kingdom in Judea as it was deemed to be unwanted and ineffective and replaced with a governor.²⁶Rome knew that the Jewish aristocratic class and priesthood could work better as an autonomous channel of Rome’s power.²⁷ This was a clever use of influence by Rome to

²⁶ Schurer, Emil. *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*. T & T Clark, 2014. 307.

²⁷ Ferguson, Everett. *Encyclopedia of early Christianity*. London: Routledge, 2016.43. Ferguson explains how client Kings would be in charge of levying taxes, protecting trade routes, maintaining security in the

keep the leading aristocratic authorities in the province dependent, yet somewhat autonomous in their own leadership. Ferguson describes the situation best when he states, “Provinces of Rome could indirectly serve Rome’s interests without Rome assuming responsibility.”²⁸ By allowing the Jewish elites to continue to work and serve in their respective offices, Rome was able to use this relationship to their advantage as a colonizing force. Why take the risk of enforcing Roman custom and law onto a populace when the empire can get other’s to do it for them?

The relationship between Jewish and Roman authorities resulted in social unrest because the temple representing God was now influenced by Roman colonization. It should be noted here, that Jewish aristocracy acting at times as puppets of a Roman Empire were not met with admiration and praise by the citizenry. In the view of the overtaxed, impoverished, landless, and observant Jew, the aristocracy in Jerusalem was as representative of the Jewish people as any President of the United States is representative of all their citizens. In stating this, I’m implying that the clear majority of Judean populace did not support Jewish leadership or they were completely indifferent towards them. The temple leadership was respected because of what it represented, which was God, even though the leaders of the temple were not always given this same adoration. In his antiquities, Josephus writes that among a social order that was crumbling, it was mainly because Jewish and Roman powers began collaborating together to promote class warfare among the people.²⁹ In response to this unyielding

frontiers all being beneficial to Rome (45). In time, client Kingdoms disappeared into the provincial structure.

²⁸ Ferguson, . Ibid 45.

²⁹ Josephus, *Ant* 20.181

display of power among the elites of Judea, the populace responded in kind with “the masses bent on destruction of those in power.”³⁰ This relationship between the two very powerful Jewish and Roman elites kept the people in a constant state of division. The temple as a social symbol having been corrupted by Roman influence was one of the leading factors to the increase in widespread revolt in the first century.

II. TEMPLE ACTIVITIES: ROMAN CONTROL AND DISHONOR

Roman collaboration with temple authorities had become a symbol for policial resitance for many of the Jewish people because the temple was supposed to represent God. There have been volumes written on the importance of the Temple and how many different sects of Judaism viewed it. To remark in detail on the importance of the Temple on an architectural and religious level would only diminish such volumes. Instead, I will quote Josephus who said, “Viewed from without, the Sanctuary had everything that could amaze either mind or eyes.”³¹ In the first century, the temple was everything and at the same time it had become nothing; a point I wish to elaborate on. The temple in Jerusalem, viewed from the outside world, would have appeared as an impressive wonder of the world. With its meticulous detail and highly fortified walls, the Temple could have been considered the center of the world; as it was for many diaspora Jews. The Romans would have been impressed with the structure of the Temple, because it eclipsed in size many of their own temples to their Gods; it would not, however, have been foreign to them. After

³⁰ Ibid., 7.260.

³¹ Josephus,. Ibid 204.

all, Roman religion practiced animal sacrifice, retained priests, and people clamored for the approval of their chosen imperial gods.³² On a strictly symbolic and religious level, the Temple represented the authority of God on earth. Therefore, those who were set with the task of running the Temple were viewed as representatives of this divine sanction.

Rome repeatedly ignored the divine sanction and interferred into temple activities throughout the first century. Herod's rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem was an action taken by an illegitimate King under the control of Rome. Herod the Great began rebuilding the temple in 19 B.C. The rebuilding would last for almost sixty years and not be completed until around 63 C.E. seven years before its destruction. Herod's goal in rebuilding the temple could have been to curry the favor of the Jewish populace, which questioned Herod's own lack of Jewish identity due to his position as a puppet king with the Roman Empire. The rebuilding could have been just another massive project of Herod's who taxed the populace heavily to construct many projects, such as the fortresses at Masada, Antonia, Herodium, or the port city of Caesarea.³³

The problem should speak for itself. If the Temple is supposed to be built and run by Yahweh and for Yahweh, how would it look for a foreign puppet king such as Herod to be rebuild it?³⁵ Herod was not King David and not even viewed as an authentic representative of the Jewish people. Furthermore, who did Herod represent in his Kingship? For many Judeans, he represented Rome and, by extension, the Emperor who claimed to be God. Herod's rebuilding of the Temple, while having its benefits for the people, only furthered resentment. One can imagine, passing by the construction of the

³² Goodman, Martin. *Judaism in the Roman world collected essays*. Boston: Brill, 2007. 47.

³³ Crossan, John Dominic. *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome, Then and Now*. HarperOne, 2008. 37.

³⁵ Trost, Travis Darren. *Studies in Biblical Literature, Volume 139: Who Should Be King in Israel?: A Study on Roman Imperial Politics, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Fourth Gospel*. Peter Lang, 2010. 11.

massive project, going to give your daily sacrifice. Instead of seeing a symbol of national pride, you see a symbol of foreign intrusion.

Rome interfering with the daily activities in the temple was an attempt to control the Jewish elites. One way that Rome prevented the priesthood from becoming too powerful or speaking a message that might drive the people to revolt was by withholding their very identity from them. For example, the high priest insignia was not to be worn, but only on special occasions such as festivals. The priestly insignia was kept under Roman and Temple guard in a stone chamber in the Antonia garrison.³⁷ The insignia was only allowed out under the guidance and knowledge of Roman leadership. Josephus records the fact that the insignia was only allowed out before and returned after such festivals as Passover, Pentecost, Feast of booths, and the Day of Atonement.³⁸ This may not seem as a radical overstep of Roman authority, compared to military interventions; when taken in totality, however, it points to a greater overall problem. The Temple belonged to God, the tithes were supposed to be for God, Priests were supposed to prophesy, and yet these activities, including the very apparel of priestly adornment were now carried out under the guidance of an imperial ruler. To make matters worse, it was an imperial ruler who seemed to hold them at a distance, except in matters that were inherently Jewish.

³⁷ Winter, Paul, T. Alec. Burkill, and Géza Vermès. *On the trial of Jesus*. Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1974. 21.

³⁸ Winter., Ibid 21.

III. ANNAS, JOHN'S GOSPEL AND THE GREAT SANHEDRIN?

“Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people” (John 18:14).

John's inclusion of Annas into his trial narrative is historically reliable because at the time in which Jesus lived there were only small gatherings of councils and not a Great Sanhedrin for authorities to preside over. Jesus being brought before Annas is an example of a “little Sanhedrin” that operated in various villages throughout Judea. As a former high priest, Annas would not have resided over a formal body, but an informal body as John's gospel illustrates. In John's Gospel, the longer ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem, even before his arrest, prompted an increased threat to the establishment. John's Gospel presents Jesus as an individual known to the Jerusalem authorities, debating them, and speaking out against their authority. For example, In John 9 where Jesus debates the issue of being called Children of Abraham with the Jews. This episode ended with stones being thrown at Jesus and him going to hide in the temple. When reading John's narrative, it is inevitable that Jesus ends up being brought before a body for judgment. This is not only historically, but theologically important for John's narrative. Interestingly, John doesn't identify the formal body or group Jesus is brought before. He only mentions that “First they took him to Annas” (John 18:13). Due to the prestigious reputation of Annas, it would not have been uncommon for a man of his power to intervene in threatening matters, especially with respect to his son-in-law Caiaphas.

The view that there was a Great Sanhedrin at the time in which Jesus lived and not an informal council is a problem of language used to describe these institutions.

Different texts and authors use different words to describe the same institution. What has confused biblical scholars is that they consider the New Testament Council (*synedrion*) to mean the Great Sanhedrin rather than an informal gathering of elites for interrogation. In the *Mishna*, when referring to the Great Sanhedrin, the writers use the Hebrew word *sanhedrîn*. This translation leads scholars to view the Greek *synedrion* in the same manner. Therefore, whenever the gospels bring up Jesus being brought before the “Council,” they assume this means the historical institution of the Great Sanhedrin and not an informal gathering of Jewish elites to question an individual. Furthermore, the gospel’s narrative of the trial, especially John’s narrative, would be considered flagrant violations of the regulations of the *Mishna*.⁴¹ It must also be considered that the *Mishna* presents idealistic pictures of Jewish custom and life looking backwards from a much later period. Outside of the New Testament and *Mishna*, the works of Josephus helps us view a closer context to what we find in John’s gospel.

Josephus uses the word *boule* to refer to a council that has been convened by a King or leading authority resembling Annas convening a council in John’s gospel. Josephus uses the Greek word *boule* meaning a council, particularly a *polis*, the Greek word for an independent city.”⁴². In his *Antiquities*, Josephus refers numerous times to “councils” being convened. These are sometimes formal councils and informal councils. For example, Josephus records that Augustus “assembled his friends, and the chief men among the Romans, in the temple of Apollo.” In this instance, a council is simply a gathering of elite individuals at a King’s request. In another instance, Josephus writes

⁴¹ Ferguson, 569.

⁴² Sanders, 743.

“When the Zealots were in charge in Jerusalem they wished to eliminate Zacharias, one of the most eminent of the citizens. They ordered seventy of the leading citizens to compose a court (*boule*).”⁴³ It would be a stretch to imagine Jerusalem in the same fashion as a Greek city-state, especially when considering the High Priest would have had to be elected by the populace and rule as head of the state. What we are left with is three terms: *synedrion*, *sanhedrîn*, and *boule* in some cases referring to a council at the request of elites, an informal gathering, or about the historical institution known as the Great Sanhedrin. Furthermore, to say with the utmost assurance that at the time in which Jesus lived there was such a body in one particular form is hard to imagine.

The Great Sanhedrin in its ideal form could not have existed at the time in which Jesus lived because Roman authorities would never have given that much power to an local Jewish authority. In his book, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63BCE-66CE*, E.P. Sanders argues against the idea that the Sanhedrin was a judicial or legislative body during the time of Jesus. Sander’s writes:

There was no body that combined judicial and legislative powers, there were no appointments for life, Palestinian Jews did not all line up behind one of the two parties (no one ever includes the Essenes), the two small parties did not seat representatives in a parliament, changes of government did not just shift the numerical balance of power in an otherwise unchanged body, and legislation was not passed by the majority vote of either one or more standing legislative and judicial bodies. This whole picture is a scholarly invention, put together partly

⁴³ Josephus, *War* 744.

from little hints in diverse sources scattered over a couple of centuries, but partly made from brand new cloth, woven from threads that were spun in the twentieth century”⁴⁴

I side with Sanders’ estimate regarding twentieth-century scholarship and the claim that a Great Sanhedrin existed at the time in which Jesus lived, but perhaps not his rhetoric. If Sander’s statement is true, it would imply that the Jews as a nation were able to keep this system in a functioning judicial and legislative manner through the turbulent Hasmonean Period, Persian Period, and Roman Period. Furthermore, in his *antiquities*, Josephus tells us that Herod had members of a council executed. It would be hard to imagine that a Great Sanhedrin was able to exist in functioning fashion throughout wars, revolts, kings and rulers that would willingly hand over their power to an all Supreme Court. John’s narrative of Jesus before Annas is representative of a Jewish authority that has been decentralized. I do not doubt that the Great Sanhedrin existed in its fullest judicial capacity at times in Jewish history, but the gospel texts and history does not give us reason to believe that the Sanhedrin functioned as a legitimate judicial power post 4 B.C.E. Furthermore, later appeals to a Great Sanhedrin as found in the *Mishna* have more to do with religious observances found in the later development of Pharisaic Judaism than actual judicial rulings.

Other scholars such as Ellis Rivkin argue that the question revolving around whether there was a Great Sanhedrin or who killed Jesus isn’t the point, but rather “what killed Jesus?”⁴⁵ What type of body would have tried and executed Jesus, and on what

⁴⁴ Sanders 747.

⁴⁵ Rivkin, Ellis. *What Crucified Jesus?* Union for Reform Judaism. 2015. 64. Rivkin argues that the Sanhedrin at the time in which Jesus lived was not overtly religious, but had become overtly political.

charges? Was the council that tried Jesus a political Sanhedrin or a religious one? The line becomes even more blurred when considering the gospels don't even agree with what Jesus was charged with. James S. McLaren is helpful in placing any notion of a Sanhedrin in its proper decentralized context arguing that "under Roman provincial policy, the policy was to use the local wealthy ruling class to act as a national administrative body in the guise of a council."⁴⁶ The body that processed Jesus was a "little Sanhedrin" composed of Jewish elites to protect their political power. It is not flattering to admit that a group of religious men were primarily motivated by politics, but when considering Roman occupation, social unrest, and growing anti-temple resistance, it is not difficult to see why Jesus was processed as John's narrative presents.

At the time in which Jesus lived, there were "little Sanhedrins" throughout Judea. In a decentralized state, as was the Jewish state under Roman governance, people would have to tend to their own needs. For the Jewish people, towns and villages would have had elders and learned men to whom to look to make legal and religious decisions. The makeup of these councils or "little Sanhedrins" would vary depending on the population size. In the gospel texts, we see Jesus confronted with Pharisees and teachers of the law upon entering a village. If there was a great Sanhedrin, it isn't conceivable that they leave Jerusalem and travel to argue with a peasant about God. Therefore, my belief is that Jerusalem had a very large "little Sanhedrin" that was made up of wealthy elites whose

⁴⁶ McLaren, James S. *Power and Politics in Palestine: the Jews and the Governing of Their Land, 100 BC-AD 70*. Bloomsbury, 2015.21. McLaren argues that the Sanhedrin depicted in Josephus and the New Testament was an adaptation of the Hasmonean priestly assembly that the Romans devised as part of their general provincial policy.

position was dependent upon Rome and, in matters of political importance, acted without formal judicial or legislative authority.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ACTORS IN JOHN'S TRIAL NARRATIVE

John's trial narrative is useful to understanding how power was delineated between the priestly aristocratic class and Roman authorities at the time in which Jesus lived. The interaction between Jesus and Annas is just one instance of a possible historical tradition. Unfortunately, mostly due to the Gospels portrayals, the figures of Annas and Caiaphas are often stereotyped. For example, one only needs to watch one plethora of Jesus movies made in the last three decades and they will view Caiaphas as a dirty trickster, oppressing his people by living a privileged life guaranteed to him by his Roman counterparts. In most reconstructions based on Jesus (and there are hundreds), Annas and Caiaphas will be allotted limited time and investigation as if their lives are historically bound and can only be understood considering Jesus of Nazareth. It is my wish to focus more clearly and deeply in my own reconstruction of events and give these figures a fair treatment. Regardless of their popular and historical reputations, Annas and Caiaphas' relationships to the office they served is of the utmost importance to understanding Jewish hierarchy in the time of Jesus.

1. THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF ANNAS AND CAIAPHAS

“So, the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year” (John 18:12-13).

Unique to John’s gospel is the narrative of Jesus being sent to “Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.” This narrative departs from the Synoptic accounts and may be evidence of a historical tradition that was available to John. The text indicates that it was the Temple guard accompanied by Roman soldiers who delivered Jesus to Annas. As previously stated, it is often assumed that John’s narrative is heavily pro-Roman because it places the death of Jesus on the shoulders of the Jewish people and gives Pilate a sympathetic portrayal. However, it would not be considered pro-Roman to include Roman soldiers into the arrest and delivery of Jesus to Annas as John does, unless it was historically reliable and unavoidable. John must have been working with a historical tradition unknown or all together left out by the synoptic writers by including Roman soldiers in bringing Jesus to Annas.⁴⁷ Perhaps, this tradition had been taught orally, and was at the time of John’s gospel a corrected fact concentrating on the arrest of Jesus. The fact that Annas is even mentioned in the narrative should leap off the page in terms of revealing a possible tradition that is otherwise absent in the Synoptics.

⁴⁷ Anderson,. Ibid 52.

Annas was a political and religious leader that played a large role in first century Judean political life. Based on his reputation in the Gospels, he was a man of immense power and leadership known to the people. Based on his historical record, Annas birthed five sons and one grandson that would serve after him as high priest; this was an important man. In John's Gospel, the narrative about how Jesus was brought before Annas is evidence of the amount of power and high regard he was held in by his peers. Annas is further mentioned in Acts where, after Pentecost, he presided over the "Sanhedrin" before which the Apostles Peter and John were brought (Acts 4:6). Though the narrative of Jesus being brought before Annas is unique to John's Gospel, other examples from the New Testament show how John must have possessed an alternative historical tradition of the arrest of Jesus and the power of Annas.

The New Testament writers show Annas as a man of religious and political influence. The Gospel writers often link Annas and Caiaphas together because they made up the elite political class of their day. For example, in Luke's gospel, at the beginning of the mission of John the Baptist he states, "during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas" (Luke 3:2). In Acts 4:6, in the stoning of Stephen (which is an odd story for a group who were not supposed to have power to impose a death penalty) Annas is mentioned again with Caiaphas. The writers of the Gospels associated Caiaphas with Annas, as most likely did many of the Jewish people. The linking together of Caiaphas and Annas by the Gospel writers is easy to see if interpreting from a historical standpoint. During the time of Jesus, Caiaphas and Annas were much more popular than Jesus himself. John's inclusion of the interrogation of Jesus by Annas is reminiscent of this fact. His role in the arrest of Jesus in John's gospel shows how the division of power was

heavily concentrated on his own aristocratic priestly family, and his relationship to Caiaphas bears more attention here.

Caiaphas was able to reign longer than any other high priest because of his political connections to Annas and the Roman governors. In Jerusalem, Caiaphas reigned for 17 years; an exceptionally long period of time. According to Josephus, Caiaphas was appointed in 18 C.E. by the Roman prefect who preceded Pontius Pilate, Valerius Gratus. The sustained post of Caiaphas was most likely due to himself being a savvy navigator of the political climate under which he ruled and served. Much to the chagrin of his interpretive history, there exists no evidence of bribery or special favors that would have been deemed unordinary to explain the long reign of Caiaphas. I repeat, there is no substantial historical data concerning the corruptness of Caiaphas. He was the son in law of Annas who served from 6 C.E. until 15 C.E. In between the end of the reign of Annas as high priest and the beginning of the reign of Caiaphas, there were three other priests who served no longer than a year before being deposed by Gratus. Before being given the high priesthood, Caiaphas was a captain of the Temple.

One possible reason Caiaphas was able to serve as high priest for an extended period of time was due to the unstable actions of governors. Author Helen Bond, in her well-balanced and exceptional work *Caiaphas: friend of Rome and Judge of Jesus?* puts forward a hypothesis that after the reign of Annas, the governor Gratus deposed three priests, each within a three-year period. In response to this, the aristocratic priestly class made their grievance known to the legate in Syria, complaining directly to Rome about the treatment of the high priestly office.⁴⁸ Though Bond puts forward a historically

⁴⁸ Bond, Helen K. *Caiaphas: friend of Rome and judge of Jesus?* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004. 131.

grounded rationale for Caiaphas's long reign as high priest, there exist many reasons behind his lengthy reign. One such theory is that the legate in Syria, Gaius, wanted to mirror the priesthood in Jerusalem off the ones in Asia Minor, which consisted of only yearly appointments. The reasoning of Gaius makes perfect sense when viewing his decision from a Roman perspective. It would make sense to not give too much power to one man for an extended period of time. However, as with most cases of Roman intervention, they did not take into consideration the history and the integrity of the office of high priest seriously. Therefore, Caiaphas was the beneficiary of Rome deciding to stop depositions of high priests, in favor of more traditional appointments.

Roman governors often misjudged Jewish aristocracy when first coming to their post resulting in misguided policies. In his first turbulent years, Pilate encountered the problem of dealing with the Jewish aristocracy. The traditions of Jewish aristocracy and the Temple complex could not be handed off in yearly terms to appointed priests and expected to function as intended for the people. Furthermore, if the Temple aristocracy wasn't functioning for the people, it wasn't in Rome's best interest to keep on deposing high priests. The reign of Caiaphas was sustained because he could keep the Temple working and in turn could keep the populace from instigating a revolt.

II. What accusation do you bring against this man?

"Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to

them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death"(John 18:28-31).

John's trial narrative presents the Jewish elite and Pilate negotiating power in processing Jesus. Unique to John's Gospel is the remark that the priestly aristocracy did not enter the headquarters (Herod's Palace) so as to avoid defilement in observance of the upcoming Passover. Other than being a perfect example of dramatic irony by John (where the priestly aristocracy is concerned with defilement by a gentile home, while working to falsely put a man to death), the inclusion of this event is reminiscent of the historical relationship between the priestly aristocracy and Roman governors, because it shows the two spheres' limitations when encountering one another. Roman prefects and Jewish elite shared two spheres of influence that worked at times for the advantage of one another, and at other times a disadvantage. There were judicial and religious matters that at a fundamental level had to be shared or exchanged in between these two very powerful structures. It is this "tug of war" relationship that John's Gospel presents to us in a hyper political presentation of the trial of Jesus. The arguments between Pilate and the Jewish elite breakdown along lines of religion, politics, and, most important, over power struggles. In one sense, Pilate wants to keep the pendulum swinging in his direction and the Jewish elite wants to swing it in their direction. As the Johannine writer has conceived the narrative, it is of course Jesus caught in the middle of these two very powerful political structures, both rejecting God's truth and God's messenger.

Pilate's question "What accusation do you bring against this man?" (John 18:29) (cite) can be read as insulting the lesser power of the Jewish elites. The exchanges between Pilate and the Jewish elite unfold in four stages (18:29-31; 19:5-7; 19:12; 19:14-16). The first exchange revolves around the initial charges brought forth by the priestly

aristocracy concerning Jesus. Pilate's question, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" if taken without the belief that Pilate had foreknowledge of the arrest, the question indicates Pilate attempting to begin an interrogation of the accused in a manner similar to a Roman trial, where there were three stages of questioning to prove innocence or guilt. If Pilate's question is asked with foreknowledge of the person and accusations made toward Jesus, he is simply toying with the priestly aristocracy, and his remarks can be viewed as arrogant, condescending, and impatient. The latter opinion is the most plausible given the description of the exchange in vv 30-31. Historically, Pilate as Roman prefect, like others, was not always overtly ruthless or patient, but was more or less indifferent to the desires of the priestly aristocracy.

In John's trial narrative, the Jewish elite act as members of the retainer class who expect their influence to carry with Pilate. Instead of offering up a formal accusation, the priestly aristocracy remark, "If this man were not a criminal (lit. "one who does evil), we would not have handed him over to you" (John 18:30). This statement is not an official charge and doesn't even answer Pilate's question. It is a statement made with the expectation of the Jewish elite as members of a retainer class in Jerusalem vying for the all too familiar privilege of power from Rome. As collaborators with Roman power, the Jewish elite expects that Pilate will receive the criminal Jesus with open arms; because of this influence, the charge that they place on Jesus is irrelevant. The act of simply bringing a criminal to Pilate for interrogation should be enough to tell him they do not have jurisdiction for the penalty they desire, and most importantly, as a sharer in the power structure, Pilate is on some level obligated to interrogate Jesus.

Pilate's response in verse 31 "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law," is certainly a shot across the bow towards the priestly aristocracy. Though scholars continue to debate if the priestly aristocracy had the power in the "age of Jesus" to put someone to death (by stoning), the consensus remains that they did not. Later examples, such as the stoning of Stephen in Acts, is an example of vigilante justice and not undertaken in any official legal capacity. Therefore, Pilate's statement is a reminder to the priestly aristocracy that whatever desires they wish for Jesus, they remain desires and they are in fact powerless compared to Pilate.

John's trial narrative shows Jewish and Roman authorities debating who had jurisdiction over Jesus. The tension between Pilate and the priestly aristocracy in the previous passage is due to one obvious, but often overlooked fact, that Jesus was not a Roman citizen. While most historical reconstructions of John's passion narrative are consumed with examining John's ideological/theological trends, the overall narrative of the relationship between Pilate and the priestly aristocracy is historically reliable when looked at in a political context. One political component to look at between the relationship of elite Jews and Roman governors is jurisdiction. The priestly aristocracy seek a penalty that is beyond their jurisdiction, while Pilate is handed a lower-class man who is accused of being an "evil doer" and asked to pass judgment based on due influence between himself and the priestly aristocracy. Jerusalem did not have one or even two jurisdictions for groups to pass judgments and enforce laws within. Furthermore, the western notion of "law" amounts to nothing when considering the plurality of traditions and judicial limits present in first-century Judea. The province of

Judea held numerous ethnicities and nationalities. Judea in the time of Jesus was not even a province, but simply a smaller part of the province of Syria.⁵⁰

Jurisdiction was a great concern to Jewish and Roman authorities because it crossed in between their two powerful spheres of influence. When issues of jurisdiction were debated, it was no longer the domain of Rome alone, but also Jewish domain. In John's gospel we are given a narrative of these two spheres interacting and debating one another. As readers, we are given the impression that this was an ordinary practice for Jewish and Roman authorities; historically, this is very true. The population of Jerusalem had Romans, Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, Arabs, and numerous subsets of each of these groups.⁵¹ All of them fell under at different times and depending on their crime different jurisdictions. For example, Josephus records that the Temple was protected by Roman jurisdiction, and if a Roman citizen entered the Temple they could be put to death. However, Roman jurisdiction was only given to certain parts of the Temple such as outside the courtyard and no further. In similar fashion, depending on the crime, a Roman citizen could fall under the jurisdiction of the priestly aristocracy, except in matters of the death penalty.

In the first century Judea, Roman and Jewish authorities enacted laws that had to respect both groups political boundaries regarding jurisdiction. There were laws in place for Roman subjects to pay tribute (in some cases involuntarily) to the Temple, and for Jews to pay tribute to Rome.⁵² There still existed a Roman law meant for Roman citizens, but still applicable to certain aspects of everyday Jewish life and vice versa.

⁵⁰ Schürer, Emil, Fergus Millar, and Géza Vermès, 456.

⁵¹ Hezser, Catherine. *The Oxford handbook of Jewish daily life in Roman Palestine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 71.

⁵² McLaren, 165.

Therefore, Pilate's order to take Jesus and "judge him according to your law," and not "my Law, Roman Law" is most definitely a contemptuous remark meant to aggravate the priestly aristocracy. Jurisdiction at the time of Jesus was not set down in clear boundaries but was propagated and established by those who held the power to enforce such laws. These laws were often used to support the power structure and relationship between Jewish elites and Roman power. However, to state that there were clear boundaries of jurisdiction and concrete laws in place to process an "evil-doer" is not historical. The law of Judea at the time of Jesus was pluralistic and rarely as rigid as the writers of the New Testament make it out to be.

In mid-first century Judea, clear lines of demarcation were often crossed regarding governance. Ever since the establishment of Judea under direct Roman Rule in 6.C.E., the Jewish people were left largely to their own affairs regarding governance and religious custom; differing from many other provinces. The Jewish people's autonomous existence naturally came into certain issues with Roman governance. There were two sets of laws working side by side to govern a single province.⁵³ The Jews were forced to make loyalty pledges and sacrifices to the Emperor; though this was less a command rather than a tradition, and most likely did not occur with any frequency. Roman citizens of Judea were also obliged to make sacrifices and donations to the Temple establishment.⁵⁴

There was often cooperation, when it served either one. between Roman governorship and Jewish elite. The governor would take up special cases, especially when it was deemed to be politically significant.. At other times, the Jewish elite would ask for Roman intervention into Jewish affairs. For example, the first procurator of Judea

⁵³ Schurer, 453.

⁵⁴ Ibid

Coponius (6-9 C.E.), sent Roman troops to guard the Temple when Samaritans dug up bones from a cemetery and placed them inside the Temple.⁵⁵ Though the first half of the century was rather subdued in terms of overt anti-Roman uprising, that does not mean there did not exist anti-Roman fervor. In most instances, the Jewish elites found themselves balancing between preventing rebellion and being overly zealous towards Rome's favor.

III. PONTIUS PILATE AND THE SOURCES

The historical Pontius Pilate was a politically minded governor who was indifferent and at times over zealous in his treatment of the Jewish populace. The first aspect to consider about the Johannine presentation is that Pilate is not the primary character of the story; it is Jesus. The Johannine narrator is not interested in presenting a heroic narrative of Pilate, outside of how he interacts with and at times seems sympathetic towards Jesus. The second aspect to consider is that when investigating "John's Pilate" for historical accuracy, we are looking for a character whom the author himself probably did not consider to be a historical portrait of the man. The only historical aspect of John's Pilate is found in his function in the narrative, which is that of a man who orders the crucifixion Jesus after being pressured by the Jewish elite. Furthermore, I am not investigating how Pilate interacted with Jesus, but how he negotiated with the Jewish elite because of Jesus. Rather than give a literary analysis of Pilate and Jesus filled with methods on how to read ancient narratives, I will discuss the historical record of Pilate. As Pontius Pilate is one of the main focal points in discussing

⁵⁵ Schurer, 466.

Roman and Jewish hierarchies at the time in which Jesus lived, I will devote considerable attention to his life, time, and works while governor.

Pontius Pilate was a man with a military background who was aware of the political implications of his job as governor. Pilate served as the governor of Judea from 26-36 C.E. Many works have been written on how Pilate functioned in his official capacity; his job title, actions, and psyche. One of the questions often raised is how to define procurator and prefect and what did these titles entail? In the texts available to us, such as Josephus, Philo, and the Gospels, prefect and procurator are used interchangeably, and most likely, at least in the mid-first century, were viewed as such.⁵⁶ To state it simply, the word prefect implies an office suitable to a person of a military background, while procurator is a title pertaining to a management position over finances. Based on all accounts, Pilate was a member of the equestrian class of Rome who often had a miliarial background. Due to his appointment as governor of Judea, Pilate likely came from a semi-wealthy, influential family, finally being appointed governor of Judea by the Emperor Tiberius. Hypothetically, his day-to-day activities would have involved being in charge over miliarial, judicial, and fiscal responsibilities of Judea. His foremost responsibilities would have included assuring the fiscal house of Judea was in order, maintaining the collection of taxes by the established authorities (Jewish elites), engaging in public works and building projects, and most important, keeping the peace in the province. Pilate would have had his own counsel of advisors and assistants that he carried with him to his headquarters in Caesarea. These are just vague notions and job descriptions that tell us nothing about his “real” capacity as governor and the groups and

⁵⁶ Carter, Warren. *Pontius Pilate: portraits of a Roman governor*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003.8.

individuals he interacted with daily. As with any governor of Judea in the first century, the most important aspect of their reign was not recorded by history.⁵⁷

The gospel accounts and non-biblical sources do not give us any insight into the character and specific duties of Pontius Pilate. Outside of a governor's official capacity, little is known about their everyday activities. For example, we know governors oversaw collecting taxes, but the who and how they exactly accomplished this task is largely unknown to us. When attempting to construct an accurate portrait of Pilate, we are burdened with a historical record that does not give insight into the man's psyche or character.⁵⁸ In John's trial narrative we are presented with a particular psyche of Pilate that is sympathetic and indecisive as to the guilt of Jesus, but this is John constructing a narrative to turn the focus back on Jesus. In another instance, Philo gives a different portrait of Pilate compared to John's narrative, when describing him as "a man of inflexible disposition, harsh and obdurate." "The historical record of Pilate can only be examined based on the accounts available. These accounts are often biased in either an extremely negative or positive portrayal, not of the man, but the events that he undertook. For example, we know of building projects, military posts and sizes, and yet we do not know the "type of man" that would have run it all."⁵⁹ There are accounts of battles and massacres, but we have no in-depth reasoning as to why the events occurred the way they did. The person of Pontius Pilate most definitely falls into this category of unknowns.

The available historical sources concerning Pilate present him as a ruthless governor, often ignoring Jewish sensibilities. For the historical record of Pilate, we have

⁵⁷ Sicker, Martin. *Between Rome and Jerusalem: 300 years of Roman-Judaeian relations*. Westport: Praeger, 2001.

⁵⁸ Anderson, 212.

⁵⁹ Carter, 18.

three sources, Josephus, Philo, and the Gospels. The Gospels of course, present re-presentations of Pilate and the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Luke's gospel mentions Pilate killing some Galileans "whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices" (Luke 13:1). Philo reports that not long after taking the position of prefect of Judea, Pilate attempted to set up shields displaying the picture of the emperor or the name of an emperor(s). Josephus reports that Pilate tried to introduce standards into Jerusalem with the image of the emperor on them. Josephus also records Pilate massacring a group of Samaritans led by a prophet on Mt. Gerizim.⁶⁰ With the above-mentioned sources and incidents, one could surmise that Pilate was an oppressive and ruthless governor of Judea. This description of Pilate may be suitable according to the sources available to us, however, considering that history judges based on events that are worthy of writing down, and often written with a pretext for judgment, a more liberal view of Pilate is in order.

⁶⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.85-18.108

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LANGUAGE OF AUTHORITY IN THE ARREST OF JESUS

1. THE ARREST OF JESUS

“So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons”

(John 18:3).

The question at the forefront of most reconstructions of Jesus’ arrest is: why was he arrested? While the cause of the arrest is theologically and historically important to understanding the ministry of Jesus, an examination of John’s political narrative gives us more insight into the historical relationship between Jewish and Roman elites of the day. The narrative framework of Jesus’ arrest reveals Jewish and Roman police working in unison to apprehend Jesus at the bequest of Jewish elites. By examining the John’s extended ministry of Jesus, the ethnic makeup of the arresting forces, the large number of troops present for the Passover, and John’s legal language, I argue that John’s presentation of the arrest of Jesus presents us with a plausibly historical picture of the conglomerate between Jewish and Roman elites.

John’s account of the extended ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem and of the Jewish elites foreknowledge of him is probably historically reliable. John’s gospel places the ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem on four different occasions. Two occasions are during Passover (John 2:13,12:12), one during an unnamed festival (John 5:1), and one at the

festival of Dedication (John 10:22). The third Passover is mentioned at the feeding of the 5,000. We know that it was expected for any devout Jew to make a pilgrimage to three major festivals in their lifetime according to Deuteronomy 16:16 that states, “Three times a year—on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of Weeks, and on the Feast of Booths—all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place that He will choose. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.” Furthermore, we know that this commandment of pilgrimage was taken seriously, based on Josephus’ remark in his *War 19.1* where the town of “Lydda, near Jerusalem had emptied for the festival of Tabernacles.” If towns are reported to have emptied for the festival of Tabernacles, it seems even more likely that many people, including Jesus and his disciples, traveled to Jerusalem for Passover.

By placing the extended ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem, John portrays the Jewish and Roman elites as having foreknowledge of his arrest. For example, in John 11:50 Caiaphas tells the council, “You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.” In John 11:57 he writes that while the time for the Passover was nearing, “the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.”

In his trial narrative and exchanges between Pilate and the Jewish Priests there is perhaps a notion of a preordained agreement about the fate of Jesus. In John 18, when bringing Jesus to Pilate for interrogation he asks, “What accusation do you bring against this man?” They answered, “If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him according to

your law.” The Jews replied, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death” (John 18:31) Pilate is attempting to begin an interrogation of the accused in a manner similar to a Roman trial, where there were three stages of questioning to prove innocence or guilt. If Pilate’s question is asked with foreknowledge of the person and accusations made toward Jesus, he is simply toying with the priestly aristocracy, and his remarks can be viewed as arrogant, condescending, and impatient. The latter opinion is the most plausible given the description of the exchange in vv 30-31. Historically, Pilate as Roman prefect, as others, were not always overtly ruthless or patient, but were indifferent to the desires of the priestly aristocracy.

In John’s gospel, the use of force mirrors other historical incidents that involve Roman intervention at the request of Jewish hierarchies. In Josephus’s *War*, he writes, “About the year 50 C.E., during a clash between Samaritans and Galilean pilgrims passing through Samaria, one of the pilgrims was killed. A crowd came from Galilee, bent on revenge, but the best-known men went to the Roman procurator, Cumanus, to urge him to send troops and punish the murderers, thus putting an end to the matter.”⁶¹ Based on the account of Josephus, it is not inconceivable to envision that a request was made on behalf of the Jewish elite (best known men) to the Roman leadership to have a large number of Roman troops accompany the temple guards to arrest Jesus. Furthermore, it is in this mode of thinking that Caiaphas uttered the phrase “you do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.” It is a historical fact that an increased military presence would

⁶¹ Josephus, Flavius, Martin Hammond, and Martin Goodman. *The Jewish war*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 2.322-44.

have been available in Jerusalem during the Passover festival and large numbers of them were brought in at the request of the procurator to assist in possible revolts and uprisings that were known to have taken place at this volatile time.

There are two specific words that John uses in his arrest narrative that point to the historical environment at the time of Jesus regarding Jewish and Roman authorities. John 18:3 states, “So Judas brought a detachment (*speira*) of soldiers together with police (*hypēretēs*) from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.” The terms *speira* and *hypēretēs* denote a legal capacity, as of a group who has authority or has been given authority.⁶² In the evangelist’s narrative, *hypēretēs* is used a total of nine times usually referring to the Temple police. Further use of *hypēretēs* in John’s gospel is seen during the trial of Jesus before Pilate, where it is the “chief priests and officers (*hypēretēs*)” who shout, “Crucify *Him*, crucify *Him!*” (John 19:6). John’s gospel differs from the synoptic accounts in that he chooses to use the word *hypēretēs*, instead of *ochlos* (crowd). In the synoptic accounts of the arrest of Jesus in Gethsemane, the generic term *ochlos* (crowd) is used (Mk 14:43; Matt 26:47; Luke 22:47).

Based on the synoptic usage of *ochlos*, it is unclear who is actually doing the arresting of Jesus; is the group Roman soldiers and Temple police or a generic crowd or mob? Another example of how the term *hypēretēs* denotes legal authority is present in Luke’s gospel where the author uses the term first in the prologue to speak to “the eyewitnesses and servants (*hypēretēs*) of the word” (Luke 1:1), and when Jesus finishes

⁶² Beasley-Murray, George Raymond. *Word Biblical Commentary: John*. Revised ed. Vol. 36. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000. 309.

his reading of the scroll, handing it to the “minister” (Luke 4:20). By John choosing to use *hypēretēs*, which carries a legal authority over *ochlos*--which is generic-- he is making the case for a combined use of authority between Roman and Jewish police. The word *hypēretēs* (police/officers) had to be specifically chosen by John because it reflected the historical environment and authorities that arrested Jesus. Often characterized as being a “pro-Roman” gospel, it would be odd for John to choose the term *hypēretēs* if he were attempting to clear Rome in the arrest of Jesus; or to lay the blame solely at the feet of Jewish hierarchy. Furthermore, in the synoptic accounts, it is logical that the crowd coming to arrest Jesus was sent on behalf of the high priests, but the “crowd” (*ochlos*) is a generic term that does not denote any official legal capacity or authority. Yet, we have John choosing to attach legal authority to the arrest of Jesus, both Jewish and Roman authority. We have John choosing to insert Roman soldiers into the arrest account, mixing them with *hypēretēs* (police/officers) Temple guards.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TRIAL OF JESUS IN JOHN'S POLITICAL NARRATIVE

I. ARE YOU THE KING OF THE JEWS?

"Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" (John 18:33)

John's focus on Kingship in his trial narrative represented a historically legitimate threat to Jewish and Roman authorities. All four Gospel accounts of the trial of Jesus before Pilate use the phrase, "King of the Jews." Outside of the trial narrative, references to kingship in John's Gospel are rare compared to the Synoptics. The fact that John's Gospel contains fewer references to kingship is not ultimately important, but understanding how the limited usage of kingship in his narrative occurs shows that a historical tradition was probably available to John. In the Synoptic accounts, references to kingship such as "King of the Jews," or references to the kingship of Jesus such as the phrase "kingdom of God/Heaven" are numerous. For example, in Matthew's Gospel there are 53 references to the kingship/kingdom of Jesus. In Mark's Gospel there are 22 references to kingship and in Luke's there are 41. In John's Gospel there are just 16 references to the kingship of Jesus. What is important is that out of the 16 references to the kingship/kingdom of Jesus in John's gospel ten of those are referenced in the evangelist's trial narrative (John 18:33,36,37,39; 19:3,12,14,15,19,21).

John's focus on the kingship of Jesus in his trial narrative shows that there were some in the Jewish populace that considered Jesus a king and it was this notion of popular

kingship that threatened Jewish and Roman authorities. Outside of the trial narrative, references to kingship/kingdom are found in John 1:49, where Nathaniel declares, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” After feeding the five thousand, it was the crowd who attempted to “come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself” (John 6:15). Upon his entry into Jerusalem Jesus was hailed as “King of Israel.” (John 12:13;15). These references in John’s Gospel portray a kingship that is viewed in a nationalist light⁶⁶ that corresponds to the political presentation of the trial narrative. John either decided to focus on kingship primarily in his trial narrative, or he was bound to a tradition surrounding the popular kingship of Jesus during his trial.

In John’s trial narrative the phrase “King of the Jews” is interpreted on a religious, political and theological level. It is noteworthy that John does not give us the reader one single picture of kingship. The question for John is very simple, which notion of kingship can be applied to Jesus? He answers this question by giving us three views of kingship from the Jewish elite, Pilate, and Jesus himself. Was the kingship of Jesus strictly religious, political, or theological, and is any of it historical?

The Jewish elite view the kingship of Jesus as absurd, but popular enough to be considered a threat. According to John’s gospel some in the Jewish populace did view Jesus as a type of king. In John 19:7, the Jewish elite make a religious claim surrounding the perceived threat of kingship of Jesus, they state “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.” In this instance, Jesus can be viewed as some form of a messianic pretender having made blasphemous

⁶⁶ ATLA WEBSITE

statements that people took on some level seriously. The reaction of the Jewish elite in bringing Jesus to Pilate is proof enough of how seriously they took this notion of kingship. In their view, Jesus was one of many peasants making a false claim to kingship during the Passover Festival to arouse resistance in people.

In John's trial narrative the language of kingship spoken by Jesus is clearly theological. In John 18:36 Jesus makes a theological claim to kingship, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." The Johannine tradition presents us with two types of Kingdoms; that which is witnessed to by Jesus and that of Pilate and the Jewish elite. One Kingdom proclaims and witnesses to the truth of God, while the other rejects this truth. Anyone who does not recognize the "truth" (John 18:37) is therefore "part of the world" (John 18:36) and runs opposite to the teaching and belief in Jesus Christ.⁶⁷ In John's narrative, Jesus is very much like a king if one considers the function of a king. The reader views Jesus as a leader and shepherd of his flock, one who brings life, protection, judgment, and peace not as "the world gives" (John 14:27). The duality pervades almost every aspect of John's gospel.

In John 18:33 Pilate views the kingship of Jesus as strictly political when asking, "Are you the Kings of the Jews." This question is asked to ascertain two aspects of Jesus; One, are you making a claim of kingship that relates to the political reign of Rome? Two, what is the nature of your kingdom?⁶⁸ It is the identity of Jesus that is of the utmost concern to Pilate, as read in these examples from his interrogation of Jesus, "Are you the

⁶⁷ Anderson, 65.

⁶⁸ John commentary

King of the Jews?”(John 18:33) “Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” (John 18:35) “So you are a king?” (John 18:37) “Where are you from? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” (John 19:9). The claim of kingship is important because it is what qualifies Pilate judicially to hear the case before him. The Jewish authorities had the power to charge and process a criminal, but they did not have the power to execute. Therefore, while it may be that Jesus was viewed as a blasphemous evildoer, it was the notion of kingship that Pilate focused on in his interrogation.

Before discussing the notion of kingship in specific historical contexts, I want to note that whether or not Jesus claimed ‘kingship’ was not going to acquit him of his fate; historically or theologically. Theologically, John’s Passion narrative portrays Jesus as the liberator of the world, fulfilling scripture at every step as is seen in his prayer before his arrest, “And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled” (John 17:11-12). Historically, Pilate would have treated Jesus in the same manner as many other individuals who were accused of certain crimes. The author Scott McKnight argues that the only group truly capable of swaying the opinion of Pilate would not have been the Jewish elite, but the crowds, who in John’s narrative are on the verge of spiraling violently out of control.⁶⁹ While it is impossible to know historically the makeup of the crowds or the size, (though

⁶⁹ Knight 51

considering it was Passover it could have been fairly large) Pilate's indifference towards the Jewish elite make this claim plausible.

By ordering the inscription "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," on the cross this could be viewed as a blatant indifference towards the Jewish elite on the part of Pilate. John 19:20-22 states, "Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.' Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." This narrative of Pilate ordering an inscription on the cross of Jesus is only found in John's gospel narrative. This action by Pilate could be viewed as extreme indifference to Jewish sensibilities, which, as I've written, would suit his record of activity; there is, however, also historical evidence for crucifixions being used as propaganda for Roman power.⁷⁰ Josephus records in the generation after Jesus, Titus' army would crucify Jews caught in the cross hairs of the Roman army's siege of Jerusalem. Josephus laments that crosses were placed in view of the city walls to 'induce the Jews to surrender in order to avoid the same fate. The soldiers themselves through rage and bitterness nailed up their victims in various attitudes as a grim joke until, owing to the vast numbers there was no room for crosses, and no crosses for the bodies."⁷¹ In this estimation, Pilate's order of inscribing "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" on the cross could be a warning to anyone who would threaten the empire and as a reminder to the Jewish elite who held the higher ground.

⁷⁰ McKnight, Scot, and Modica, Joseph B., eds. *Who Do My Opponents Say That I Am? : An Investigation of the Accusations Against the Historical Jesus*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008. 34. McKnight states that crucifixion was a common deterrent throughout the provinces of the Roman Empire.

⁷¹ Josephus, *War* 5.450.

II. THE NOTION AND THREAT OF KINGSHIP

John's trial narrative and the concentration on the kingship of Jesus by the Jewish elite and Pilate would have been a real historical concern. As I have previously stated, there are no written historical accounts outside of the New Testament of violent revolt or protest at the time in which Jesus lived. The only record of kingship we have for this period is of Jesus and his followers written after his life and mission. The numerous examples of kingship/kingdom found in the Gospel texts were birthed out of a tradition of kingship in Jewish culture that was based in scripture and politics. The historical record concerning kingship we do possess reveals that it was a popular notion among the lower strata of society crossing boundaries between violent and non-violent movements.

Any notion of kingship made by lower classes would have been labeled by the Jewish and Roman elite of their day as "social banditry" because it represented a threat to their authority. Social banditry is a catch all category for groups and people who don't advocate for the status quo that had enriched so many of the upper class of the time. Modern biblical and historical scholarship have tried to breakdown the term "social banditry" into sub-groups such as millenarian, charismatic, apocalyptic, prophetic, royal pretenders, and zealotry groups to better classify their social placement. While it is true that not all of these groups were Social Bandits, all would have been viewed as such by the elites of the day.

The elites of the day saw social bandits as working against the welfare of society. Josephus provides us with our only real source for viewing the phenomenon of social banditry and individuals claiming Kingship. It should be noted, that Josephus was quite

unsympathetic towards these groups and the men that would be thrust to the front of their movements. Throughout his work in the *Jewish War* Josephus calls these individuals, “desperate men,” “ravaging their own nation,” “seditious bands,” and “inciting fanaticism.” In his *histories* Tacitus claimed: “The majority firmly believed that their ancient priestly writings contained the prophecy that this was the very time when the East should grow strong and that men starting from Judea should possess the world.” These quotations exhibit an elitist point of view towards the phenomenon of social banditry. One only needed to claim or act in the slightest subversive manner to be considered a social bandit.

Social banditry and making claims of kinship almost always occurred when the social or political structure changed.⁷² For example, Josephus records that after Herod’s death in 4 BCE throughout the entire territory violent rebellion broke out with individuals making claims to kingship. One example of such a social bandit was Judas son of Ezekias, who “caused fear in everyone by plundering those he encountered in his craving for greater power and in his zealous pursuit of royal rank.”⁷³ One has to consider the bias of Josephus in this quotation. We can tell, however, that social bandits organized followings and proclaimed a leader who, in many cases, sought after kingship. In another example, Simon “a servant of King Herod” was:

An imposing man in both size and bodily strength, and he was confident of distinguishing himself. Spurred on by chaotic social conditions, he dared to don the diadem. When he had organized some men, he was also proclaimed king by

⁷² Horsley, 61.

⁷³ Josephus, *Ant* 17.271-72.

them in their fanaticism, and he thought himself more worthy of this than anyone else.⁷⁴

Change in social or political conditions were viewed by social bandits and many in the lower class of society as opportunities to seize control and influence over or against the status-quo (this is still relevant in many countries today). In doing so, these individuals and groups would seize upon Jewish notions of Kingship to accomplish their religious or political goals.

Another example cited by Josephus was Anthronges, a man whose eminence derived neither from the renown of his forefathers, nor from the superiority of his character, nor the extent of his means. He was an obscure shepherd, yet remarkable for his stature and strength.⁷⁵ He dared to aspire to kingship on the ground that having obtained it he would delight in greater wantonness.

In both of Josephus's stories, we have descriptions of men with considerable strength, organizing followers, who chose to "don the diadem," which symbolized kingship. The mentioning of their strength or physical stature was common because it fit the model of kingship throughout Jewish culture. In *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements at the time of Jesus*, Richard Horsley states that the physical stature was important for making claims to kingship because "Living under an oppressive and illegitimate King installed by an alien power, the people were ready for an "anointed" charismatic leader from among the peasantry like David of old."⁷⁶ Other scholars, such as

⁷⁴ Josephus, *War* 2.56.

⁷⁵ Josephus, *Ant* 17.273-76.

⁷⁶ Horsley, 109.

Ekkehard Stegemann, agree with this assessment: “Often times a social bandit would make messianic claims in the tradition of Saul and David.⁷⁷ The sacred traditions of messianic Kingship, though often overly exaggerated, pulled weight with the lower class in society. It was David the lowly shepherd boy who would rise and chase down Saul to gain his Kingship. While David was not a large man, his strength was with God. A blind man could see how effective scripture when combined with politics was enough to organize oppressed individuals and make a claim to kingship. It also takes no stretch of imagination to recognize that the elites would have viewed these people as fanatical and violent bandits.

In John’s trial narrative, Pilate and the Jewish elites viewed Jesus and his claim of kingship as improbable due to his lack of social standing. In John’s gospel, we do read that Barabbas, whose name literally means “insurrectionist,” was set free. Did Barabbas and Jesus have anything in common? The obvious and simple answer is yes, they both were at the will of the Jewish and Roman power structure that could detain or dispose of them if making any claim threatening the status-quo. There are some scholars, such as Brian Sticker, who propose the notion that Pilate would have viewed Jesus as a cynic or sage. Such persons, due to their knowledge and social standing, might make a claim to kingship, as was common in Roman culture.⁷⁸ However, what social standing would Jesus have had to make a claim to kingship? As I previously stated, in John’s gospel the people wanted to come and make Jesus King, so he withdrew (John 6:15). History gives us only sparse accounts of individuals brought before Roman governors. One such

⁷⁷ Stegemann, Ekkehard W. *Jesus movement: a social history of its first century*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001. 314.

⁷⁸ Sicker, 40.

example that Josephus records is that of the peasant ben Hananiah who was brought to the governor Albinus (62-64C.E.) by the Jewish elite for claiming kinship. In this case Albinus had him whipped (very similar to Jesus) and then released. This example would be a rare case of someone making a claim to kingship who was released. In most cases, the bandits were beheaded, crucified, or exiled; mostly beheaded.

Individuals making claims to kingship would have been a real and conceivable threat in the first century Judea. Usually coming from the lower strata of society, social bandits and movements often blurred the lines between politics and religion. I should note that the upper strata of society held notions of kingship that stood in stark contrast to the lower strata. For instance, Jesus making a claim to kingship would have been inconceivable to the Jewish elites of his day. No matter how inconceivable claims of kingship were by Jesus or any other individual may have seemed, they still represented a threat to the social order of the Jewish and Roman authorities. The first century was a debate about who spoke for God? Some social bandits chose to use violence to express their dissatisfaction with the status-quo, while other groups, such as the Essenes, chose to remove themselves completely from the environment and wait for God to move. John's trial narrative shows how serious the Jewish and Roman authorities would have perceived any notion of kingship that risked their position in society and the social rest of Jerusalem at the time.

III. NO FRIEND OF THE EMPEROR

“If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor” (John 19:12).

John’s trial narrative presents an accurate portrayal of how the relationship between Jewish and Roman authorities was controlled by foreign imperial influence. At the time in which Jesus lived there was a push among the elites to promote emperor worship as a means to unify diverse populations under Roman rule.⁷⁹ This promotion failed in all possible respects. At this point in John’s narrative, the priestly class has moved from presenting Jesus as a criminal to Pilate to one claiming to be the Son of God; a messianic claim denoting kinship. Because of his reluctance to sentence Jesus, the Jewish elite gives a reminder of Pilate’s past failures as governor.

The Emperor Tiberius previously ordered Pilate to remove votive shields that outraged the local populace. Pilate in an attempt to promote emperor worship, or perhaps simply display his power, introduced votive shields into Herod’s palace in Jerusalem. The shields contained names of the emperor and the one who dedicated them. Outrage ensued because of the overt actions of Pilate and the conceived promotion of pagan symbols. According to Philo, even the sons of Herod thought the display to overtly aggressive, recording their sentiments, “Do not arouse sedition, do not make war, do not destroy the peace; you do not honor the emperor by dishonoring ancient laws. Do not take Tiberius as your pretext for outraging the nation; he does not wish any of our customs to be overthrown.” Pilate refused all delegations and pleas for him to remove the shields from the palace. Eventually, the Jewish elite sent a delegation to Tiberius himself who decided

⁷⁹ Sicker, 109.

against Pilate and forced him to remove the shields to the Temple of Augustus in Caesarea. The threat of imperial power was a concern for Pilate in maintaining control over his territory, and more importantly, keeping a good influence with the Emperor and his officials. Being overruled by Emperor Tiberius must have been for Pilate just one more embarrassment to his residency as governor of Judea.

Pilate feared that his failure to crucify Jesus would get back to the emperor and result in another failure in his term as governor. In John's trial narrative, the Jewish elite make the threat "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor" (John 19:12). The phrase "no friend to Caesar," was a term used mostly to refer to the individuals in the senatorial ranks in the empire.⁸⁰ To be a friend to Caesar was to seek his influence by doing his will, any notion to not act in accordance with the will of the emperor was perceived as a threat. Pilate was forced to act not because of threats made by the Jewish elite, but because of the imperial influence that his decisions would carry with Rome. . Pilate would have known about how the spokesman for Tiberius was executed for sedition by Tiberius in 29CE. Whether this is historically true, or if Pilate and the Jewish Elite would have known of such an event is unknown, but it is possible. Furthermore, this acquiescence to the Roman imperial power was echoed by the Jewish elite in their protestation, "We have no King but the emperor" (John 19:15). These are just examples found in John's trial narrative of how the relationship between Jewish and Roman elites were controlled by foreign imperial Rome.

⁸⁰ Beasley-Murray, George Raymond. 211.

Pilate's treatment of Jesus was purely political and not motivated by anti-Semitic belief of Emperor Tiberius. Under Tiberius, especially in Rome, Jews were aware of his anti-Semitic leanings.⁸¹ In changing the participation laws in the army, and promoting emperor worship throughout the empire Tiberius had established a very anti-Semitic platform. The Jews in Judea would have been mostly autonomous from direct Roman anti-Semitism, with only smaller altercations with Rome at large; for Pilate, however, executing Jesus was strictly political because of the fear that he would be considered inept in his duty to the Emperor. One must cut through the dramatic irony of John's narrative and attempt to isolate the activity of Pilate towards Jesus and the Jewish elite. I do not hold, as some scholars do, the belief that, like Sejanus and Tiberius, there was some form of inherited anti-Semitism in Pilate's remarks and behavior. Furthermore, if Pilate was anti-Semitic why did he not jump at the opportunity to execute Jesus? Why the hesitation? In fact, I think Pilate was indifferent to the possible crucifixion of Jesus; it is probable that he was more concerned with his position of power, and the place it occupied during the trial, as compared with that of the priestly aristocracy. For Pilate, the dynamic wasn't inherently religious-- as the dynamic was for Jesus and the priestly aristocracy—as much as it was strictly political..

In John's passion narrative, the historical relationship between the Jewish and Roman authorities and the power they shared emerges at the center of the narrative. The narrative shows the spaces of power that both groups inhabited and times worked together to navigate. In the narrative of the passion, both sides are navigating what the scholar Warren Carters calls the "third tier power structure."

⁸¹ ATLA

“The first horizon includes the beginnings of Israel, when it practiced a form of decentralized politics embedded and diffused throughout its social institutions (approximately 1250–1000 BCE). 2. The second horizon refers to the “midlife” of Israel, when it adopted centralized autonomous politics in a double sense: specialized state institutions were developed with a monopoly of domestic power that was also autonomous over against other states (approximately 1000–586 BCE). 3. The third horizon represents the reconstituted life of Israel after the loss of statehood “They were forcibly subjected to a colonial form of centralized politics dictated by foreign sovereignties with which a native Israelite/Judahite hierarchy was empowered to act in local matters subject to the limits imposed by imperial powers.”⁸²

John’s trial narrative shows a Jewish hierarchy acting in accordance with their own powers appealing to a higher Roman power to execute Jesus. What makes John’s narrative stand out is Pilate’s indecision. A person could consider that the Jewish elite were the only characters acting under colonial control, however, Pilate was too under imperial influence. His actions and words express apprehensiveness and fear. In John 19:8, after being told that Jesus declared himself to be the son of God, the text states that “When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid.” Foreign imperial influence played just as much a role as did Roman colonialism did on the Jewish authorities.

⁸² Carter 77.

CONCLUSION

John's trial narrative presents the reader with an accurate depiction of the Jewish and Roman authorities at the time in which Jesus lived. His narrative is political from the very beginning when using the language of authority to present both Jewish and Roman soldiers arresting Jesus. His narrative is unique and different from the Gospels in showing Jesus being brought before Annas and not an official council, if one existed at all. John's trial narrative reveals an environment where Jewish and Roman authorities exchanged privileges and quarreled over spheres of influence that impacted the ordinary citizenry. While the Johannine presentation of Pilate is unavoidably sympathetic, that does not translate to it being ahistorical. Pilate's sympathetic actions towards Jesus could easily be translated to indifference or anger towards the Jewish elite. His past failures as governor and threat of deposition could have historically been the source of his indecisiveness. The relationship between the Jewish elite and Pilate towards Jesus is historically sound in other historical depictions of individuals being brought to Roman governors for processing. Furthermore, Jewish history provides us with sources indicating individuals did make claims to kingship and were perceived as a legitimate threat to both Jews and Romans. If John's narrative goal was to establish Jesus of Nazareth as an individual that represented a threat to Roman and Jewish power, whether real or imagined, he accomplished this task. However, his description of Roman and Jewish collaboration is in my opinion historically accurate.

I can conclude from this research that Jewish and Roman authorities collaborated in their efforts to keep the social peace and to give no quarter to perceived threats. This relationship was doomed to failure from the very beginning due to the fact that social

peace was dependent upon a working client-patron relationship that was never based on mutually exclusive benefits. The Jewish people grew tiresome of being under an empire and Rome was too accustomed to being an empire. History shows that the more collaboration between Jewish elites and Rome only worsened their ability to appease and lead people. I can deduct from John's trial narrative that at the time in which Jesus lived there were alternative ways of resistance towards Roman occupation, though to give a name to this form of resistance is not possible, due to a lack of historical documentation. As to the historicity of John's trial narrative, he does present a very accurate depiction of the Jewish and Roman elites at the time in which Jesus lived. I cannot argue that this is more of an accurate portrayal than the other Gospel narratives, however, his longer dramatic structure highlights the political aspect of Jesus's trial more so than the Synoptics. John's Gospel does contain possible historical traditions unique to his work, but I think they are merely better re-presentations of known events and not a special tradition only known to the Johannine author.

Understanding the historical relationship between the Jewish and Roman authorities is important because when Jesus is situated between the two we are given only one biased picture. Out of this biased presentation, anti-Semitic notions were birthed, and though this was not the intention of the author, a century later interpreters would latch on to this misguided interpretation of events. Many people in society today will still not engage John's Gospel because of perceived anti-Semitic notions. Scholars are not exempt from the potential for anti-Semitic exposure in their portrayals of the historical Jesus. If all a person knows is that Pilate and the Jewish elite killed Jesus, this is not a fair presentation of the event. Historical Jesus research and publications exist because they

are extremely popular; whether they can produce certain facts is irrelevant. People are clamoring to know more about the historical Jesus and his relationship to the Jewish and Roman authorities should not be taken lightly. The endless quests for the historical Jesus can be perceived as a dead end when it comes to scholarship, however, if the quest is to continue there needs to be balanced portrayals to counter the more extreme ones.

Understanding the relationship between Jewish and Roman authorities involves an actual history of the Jewish people. So much has been written recently on Empire and Jesus that a reader cannot tell if they are reading about history or a Marxist critique of the first century. There is too much method and ideology bound to presentations of the environment of Jesus, and what is needed is hard historical scholarship; the boring and tedious kind. If I took a poll on how many seminary students could write one sentence about the Maccabean Revolt or Hasmonean Dynasty the results would be disheartening. In modern scholarship we are so attached to Jesus that we veer off course to the realm of ethics and social sciences and forget about hard history. I do not want to imply that social sciences cannot be beneficial to historical Jesus research, because they most definitely can be, but without real history it has no framework. Without hard history, women in New Testament times were always oppressed and there were no exceptions. Without hard history, Pilate and the Jewish elite killed Jesus, and were not concerned with violent Jewish groups that in some cases were known for terrorizing the Jewish people. Without hard history, there was just Jesus and the Pharisees, and not a plethora of other social groups with various ideologies that existed at the time. Historical inquiries into the time in which Jesus lived should not settle for footnotes when there is real history that could open up numerous possibilities for further understanding the time period.

The future of historical inquiry into the time in which Jesus lived needs new voices. The vast majority of scholars are white men and usually American. There are womanist and African-American scholars whose works should be considered as much as their male white counterparts. While works such as *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* by Elisabeth Fiorenza presents a unique reconstruction of Christian origins, it is just as plausible and in need of critique and acceptance as many other historical Jesus works. The social sciences have proven that religious study can cut across all racial and societal boundaries, so why not history? History does not have to be black and white, but it can and it is colorful. The academy needs more voices to present a hard history to people who might not read a historical reconstruction by one of the more widely read scholars.

When studied in a specific context, historical criticism revolving around the actions, words, and deeds of Jesus can bear fruit that is worthy of calling itself historical scholarship. Furthermore, if the historical quest for Jesus has proven anything, it has shown that there remains a desire to know more about the environment and institutions he lived under. John's trial narrative is a theologically beautiful work about a historically violent death. The death of Jesus was neither historically unique, nor were the actions of the Jewish and Roman authorities. Surveying the first century relationship between Jewish and Roman authorities reveals groups trying to maintain and gain power at the cost of many other people with no stake in the game. In the political presentation of John's trial narrative, the Jewish and Roman authorities are presented in their accurate historical environment. Their relationship isn't told about narratively, but is shown in their exchanges between one another and in their treatment of Jesus. John's trial narrative

gives the reader a better understanding of this relationship both politically and historically. While John's narrative is infused with theological sentiment, one should first consider and study how harsh a narrative he was given in the first place. If you were to write a narrative about a man who was crucified by the most powerful men in society how would you tell that story?

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