

WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF ECCE HOMO?

by DAVID FLUSSER

The Latin phrase in the title of this article is a translation of the Greek in the Gospel according to St. John 19:5; its English translation would be “Behold the Man!” In the course of time, this phrase has become a familiar one; but what does it actually mean? In the context of John, it is used by the Roman Prefect, Pontius Pilate, when he presents Jesus to the people. We read how, at the time of Jesus’ trial: “Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. ‘Behold the Man!’ said Pilate. The high priests and their henchmen saw him and shouted, ‘Crucify! Crucify him!’”

This passage from the Gospel of John appears in a section paralleled in the synoptic gospels. The cry of “Crucify! Crucify him!” with which the Jewish crowd respond to Pilate’s appeal, is also found in various renditions in Matthew (27:21–23), Mark (15:12–14), and Luke (23:21–23). Earlier (in 19:1–3), John relates that Pilate had Jesus flogged, and that the soldiers wove a crown of thorns for his head, clothed him in a purple cloak, and stepped up to him saying: “Hail,

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King of Jews!” and struck him on the cheek. A similar story appears in Mark 15:16–20, where an entire cohort of Roman soldiers are said to have participated in this mock-ceremony.¹ They clothed Jesus in purple, crowned him with thorns, hailed him as “King of the Jews,” and then struck his head with a cane, spat on him, and kneeled and prostrated themselves before him. Matthew (27:27–31) received the story from Mark,² but omitted the mock-prostration by which the soldiers treated Jesus as they would a barbarian eastern monarch. According to John, the incident with the soldiers took place before Pilate decided to crucify Jesus; in Mark and Matthew, however, the outrage by the Roman soldiers followed Pilate’s decision.

Was there ever a connection between the words, “Behold the Man,” and the mock-acclamation on the part of the Roman soldiers? Pilate’s words have given rise to some curious and farfetched interpretations, all of which stem from the assumption that Pilate found no case against Jesus and therefore endeavored to save his life. This tendency to mitigate or even to expiate Pilate’s share of the guilt is already present in the gospels. Thus, in John 19:4–5: after the soldiers had abused Jesus, robed him in purple and crowned him with thorns, Pilate is shown coming out and saying to the Jews: “I am bringing him out to let you know that I find no case against him.” At this moment, Jesus emerged in his purple robe and crown of thorns, and Pilate said to the people, “Behold the Man!” The most widely accepted interpretation of Pilate’s words today is the following: the Roman Prefect displays the unfortunate Jesus, humiliated and looking ridiculous, in order to prove to the Jews that such a pathetic figure could never have been a rebel against Rome.³ There is no doubt that this modern interpretation, along with the other interpretations which have been proposed, have failed miserably to understand the intentions of Pontius Pilate. Indeed, it is difficult to know for certain whether even the gospel writer himself understood the story which he transmitted here, presumably on the basis of an earlier source.

It is clear to anyone who has studied the historical Pilate that he was a very brutal man, whose cruelty was specifically directed against the Jews.⁴ Nevertheless, it

1. The Greek word for “cohort” is a translation of the Latin *cohors*.

2. An echo of this story is heard in Luke 23:11.

3. See, for example, R.E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* [The Anchor Bible (New York, 1970)], pp. 875–876; R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium III* (Freiburg, 1976), pp. 294–296.

4. See, e.g., the seven accusations against Pilate which appear in the writings of Philo: “...they would also expose the rest of his conduct as governor by stating in full the briberies, the insults, the robberies, the outrages and wanton injuries, the executions without trial constantly repeated, the ceaseless and supremely grievous cruelty” (Philo, *Leg. ads Gaium*, chap. 38: 302; Loeb ed., X: 153).

appears to me that Pilate was indeed reluctant to have Jesus killed — though not out of any mercy or sympathy towards Jesus. At the time, he held prisoner at least three zealots condemned to crucifixion, the most important of whom was a man named Barabbas. Pilate had to decide which of his Jewish prisoners was to be pardoned in honor of the Passover festival.⁵ Shortly before the time set for the execution, Pilate turned to the crowd of Jewish demonstrators and proposed the granting of amnesty to Jesus, the Galilean prophet, whom he considered the least dangerous to his rule. But the high priests had already persuaded the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas, a popular hero; Pilate, who depended upon the support of the local leadership, was forced to give in and pardon Barabbas. From then on, his natural cruelty was directed towards Jesus. These appear to be the facts underlying the tendentious stories appearing in the gospels;⁶ for obvious reasons, the authors of these stories interpreted the facts as evidence of Pilate's sympathy towards Jesus.

Let us now return to that mock-acclamation of royalty staged by the Roman soldiers, of which Jesus was the unfortunate victim. It seems likely that such scenes were staged throughout the despotic Roman Empire, and that they victimized members of other peoples who were considered, rightly or wrongly, to be enemies of Rome. In Jesus' case, the brutal exercise was clearly understood; when he was finally crucified, a reminder of his guilt was affixed to the cross — an inscription specifying that here was crucified “the king of the Jews.” According to John (19:19–22), this inscription was written in three languages — Hebrew, Latin and Greek — at Pilate's own behest. He also relates that the high priests said: “You should not write ‘King of the Jews’; write, ‘He claimed to be king of the Jews,’” to which Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” The high priests understood clearly from this inscription that Pilate was deliberately mocking the hopes of the Jews, and they attempted to dissuade him — but Pilate, of course, would not change his mind. It should be noted that the Gospel of John contains certain important historical details not found in the other gospels. Some of these details, including the one just discussed, reflect a Jewish nationalist outlook and a concomitant hostility towards Pilate, the representative of Rome. Hence, this passage contradicts the overall tone of the Gospel of John, which is generally more antagonistic towards the Jews than the other Gospels and tends to present Pilate in a positive light.

Thus, the inscription on the cross was an attack against the Jewish belief in a

5. On the custom of granting a pardon to Jewish prisoners, see S. Safrai, *Der Wallfahrt in Zeitalter des Zweiten Temples* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1981), p. 206. Safrai cites the following passages: M. Pesahim 8:6; BT Pes. 91a; JT Pes. 36a (8:6).

6. See: D. Flusser, “The Trial and Death of Jesus of Nazareth” (Heb.), *Yahadut u-Meqorot ha-Nazrut* [Jewish Sources in Early Christianity] (Tel-Aviv, 1979), pp. 120–149.

Messianic King who would come to free Israel of the Roman yoke. The acclamation in which the Roman soldiers “honor” Jesus with the title “King of the Jews” is a kind of prologue to the story of the insulting inscription later affixed to the cross. The parody of acclamation aimed at Jesus is not the only example of anti-Semitic theatrics from this period. Several years after our story, King Agrippa I visited Alexandria in Egypt. In order to satisfy the popular desire to mock this Jewish king, the mob got hold of a certain lunatic and drove the poor fellow into the gymnasium, where they set him on high to be seen by all. There, they crowned him with reeds, robed him in a coat of straw, and gave him a stalk of papyrus to serve as a scepter; thus, the pathetic madman earned himself the accoutrements of royalty. Some of them called him “king” and in the end, they cheered him and shouted “*mari*,” the Aramaic word for “lord.”⁷ Hugo Grotius⁸ has already discussed the resemblance between this story and the soldier’s acclamation at the time of Jesus’ trial. In both cases, the mock-acclamation was clearly intended to ridicule the messianic beliefs of the Jews.

Now a third piece of evidence concerning this sort of anti-Semitic incident has been discovered. A fragmentary papyrus describes a wave of anti-Semitic unrest in Alexandria towards the end of the year 117 C.E., during the reign of the Emperor Trajan; it refers to “the king” and describes “how they brought him forth and mocked him.” The Roman Prefect himself ordered them “to lead him forth... to make fun of the king of the scene and the mime.”⁹ The availability of

7. See: Philo, *In Flaccum*, 36–39, where the description is more extensive. On the term *mari*, see: D. Flusser, “Paganism in Palestine,” in *The Jewish People in the First Century II* (Assen, 1976), p. 1078.

8. Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* (Groningen, 1837), II, p. 356 (ad Matt. 27:28–29).

9. For the text, see: *Acta Alexandrinorum*, ed. H. Musurillo (Stuttgart, 1961), p. 37; also: *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, ed. V.A. Tcherikover and A. Fuks (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), II, pp. 61–62. On this document, see: V.A. Tcherikover, *ha-Yehudim be-Mizrayim* (Jerusalem, 1945), pp. 209–211. Concerning anti-Semitic mock-acclamations, and that of Jesus in particular, compare Josephus’ *Jewish Wars* VII:29; where he relates Simeon bar Giora’s emergence from his underground hide-out following the burning of the Temple. In order to terrify the Romans, Simeon put on “white tunics and a purple mantle” and “arose out of the ground at the very spot where the Temple formerly stood.” For a few moments, his scheme was successful; the first to see him were petrified with shock. In the end, however, Simeon was taken captive. See also the appropriate note in: O. Michel & O. Bauernfeind, *Flavius Josephus: De Bello Judaico II*, 2 (Munich, 1969), pp. 226–227. It is quite possible that Simeon bar Giora deliberately appeared in this manner because he was aware of the Gentile’s fear of the coming of the Messianic King. If our hypothesis is correct, their anti-Semitic mock-acclamations also functioned on a psychological level to overcome their fear of the Messiah’s coming. In any event, Simeon’s purple mantle parallels the purple cloak in which the Roman soldiers dressed Jesus in order to mock him. The account is absent in Luke. Instead, it is related there (23:8–11) that, prior to being turned over to Pilate, Jesus was brought before Herod Antipas. Herod and his soldiers “treated him with contempt and ridicule, and sent him back to Pilate dressed in a gorgeous robe.” Some scholars have understood the word to mean “a white robe,” in which case Jesus’ white robe would parallel the white tunic of Simeon bar Giora.

only fragments of this document has given rise to a variety of scholarly hypotheses. One scholar believes that the cruel comedy was intended to mock the captive leader of the Jewish revolt in Cyrene. Another opinion holds that the Greeks in Alexandria staged a comic performance aimed at the “King of the Jews,” similar to the previously discussed mock-acclamation staged in Agrippa’s time. In any event, the papyrus indicates that the Prefect himself took an active part in this comic performance, a fact of considerable importance to our discussion.

In order to solve the riddle of the phrase, “Behold the Man!” we must turn our attention to ceremonies of acclamation in antiquity, but we must first try to explain why the Gospel of John so often contains diametrical opposites, as we have already seen to be the case with the presentation of Pilate’s personality. I first became aware of the peculiar characteristics of this gospel in connection with the expression under discussion here. In the course of my research, I came across an important book,¹⁰ which drew the same conclusion I had reached in an earlier study of this subject.¹¹

The explanation of the recurring contradictions in the Gospel of John given in the above-mentioned book seems to me to be correct, namely, that the author of the gospel had at hand a Jewish-Christian source with Jewish nationalist tendencies. This source emphasized the profound importance — to the Jews themselves — of the belief in Jesus’ messiahship. Its author was far more anti-Roman than were the other gospel writers, and his views on this point may have even led him to occasional rhetorical distortion of the historical truth. Thus, in Mark 15:15 and Matthew 27:27, we are told that a cohort of Roman soldiers took part in the mock-coronation of Jesus; in John (19:2–3), however, the technical term “cohort” is missing, because there it is self-evident that Roman soldiers were involved. Jesus spent the night in the home of the High Priest, before he was turned over to the Romans as a prisoner.^{11a} It would therefore seem reasonable to assume that he was imprisoned by the temple guard, as suggested by the account in Luke 22:52. All three synoptic gospels mention the wounding of the High Priest’s servant, which occurred at the time (see also John 18:10–11). In John, on the other hand, we read: “So Judas [Iscariot] took a detachment [cohort] of soldiers [i.e., Roman soldiers], and police provided by the high priests and the Pharisees...” (18:3). Further on: “The detachment [i.e., *cohors*] with their

10. R.T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs* (Cambridge, 1970).

11. D. Flusser, “A Jewish-Christian Source for the Gospel of John” (Heb.), *Yahadut u-Meqorot ha-Nazrut, op. cit.*, pp. 60–72. The present article is a kind of supplement to the former study.

11a. For a discussion of the events of that night, and specifically of an act of ceremonial humiliation somewhat analogous to that discussed here, see my article in the forthcoming issue of *Immanuel*, “Who is it that Struck You?”

commander, and the Jewish police, now arrested Jesus and secured him” (18:12). It therefore seems that the Jewish-Christian source of John introduced Roman soldiers into the story of Jesus’ capture, on the basis of the Roman cohort’s involvement in the mock-coronation of Jesus following his delivery to the Romans.¹² In reality, however, Jesus was detained by the High Priest’s guards, and not by Roman troops.

This example illustrates the character of John’s Jewish-Christian source. The evangelist worked part of this source, which had a very different orientation from his own, into his gospel. This process led to certain discrepancies in the flow of the narrative, which in turn produced — deliberately, it seems — the atmosphere of deep mystery which permeates the Gospel according to John. The very tension between the message of the evangelist and the orientation of his source enables us to isolate the source fragments from the gospel proper — a procedure which can be applied to the passage under discussion. Moreover, the author contributes to the confusion by repeating the episode of Pilate’s presentation of Jesus to the people and the conversations between the two men, thereby producing duplications. Thus, the influence of the Jewish-Christian source is felt even in those passages penned by the evangelist himself. We shall treat this confusing aspect of the Gospel of John only insofar as it relates to our historical question.

An examination of our passage (John 19:1–16) discloses two parallel sections: John 19:4–6 and 12–14. Each of these two sections seems to reflect, in its own way, the same passage from the original Jewish-Christian source. In both, Pilate presents Jesus to the Jews (v. 4–5; 13–14), and in both the Jews respond with the call for his crucifixion (v. 6, v. 15). The Jewish powers which militated for Jesus’ crucifixion were “the high priests and their henchmen” (v. 6), “the Jews” (v. 7, 12, 14), and “the high priests” (v. 15). To anyone familiar with the outlook of the author of this gospel, it should be clear that the mention of “the Jews” as Jesus’ enemies, here and elsewhere, is the work of the final redactor. On the other hand, the reference to “the high priests” seems to reflect the historical truth behind the trial of Jesus. The other gospels indicate that the instigators of the trial by Rome were the high priests and the Saducees, who considered Jesus’ preaching in Jerusalem a direct threat to their status. The second parallel passage contains two examples of the motif of mentioning Caesar, once at the beginning and another time at the end of the passage. Verse 12 reads, “From that moment Pilate tried hard to release [Jesus]; but the Jews kept shouting, ‘If you let this man go, you

12. Although the actual term “cohort” is not used in John’s description of the Roman soldier’s mock-acclamation, it may have appeared in John’s Jewish-Christian source, but was apparently overlooked by the writer of our Gospel.

are no friend to Caesar; any man who claims to be a king is defying Caesar.’” In verse 15, Pilate asks, “Shall I crucify your king?” and the high priests reply, “We have no king but Caesar.” Elsewhere, I shall try to show that this particular line of argument was the most likely to move Pilate, whose loyalty and obsequiousness towards Caesar were salient features of his personality. Josephus relates that, on one occasion, Pilate secretly attached busts of Caesar to military standards in Jerusalem by night. The Jews reacted by thronging to Caesarea and “for many days entreated him to take away the images. Pilate refused to yield, since to do so would be an outrage to the emperor.” In the end, however, he gave in (*Antiquities* XVIII: 53–59). With respect to our own passage, there is no doubt that anyone who put Pilate’s loyalty to Caesar to the test would spur him to immediate action. If this is so, the contents of John 19:12 and 15 must have originated in the Jewish-Christian source and reflect the actual course of events.

Let us compare Pilate’s presentation of Jesus to the Jews (before the call for crucifixion) in our two parallel passages. The second passage (John 19:13–14) reads: “When Pilate heard what they were saying, he brought Jesus out and took his seat on the tribunal at the place known as ‘The Pavement’ (‘Gabbatha’ in the language of the Jews)... Pilate said to the Jews, “Here is your king.” We may understand the Greek word translated as “he sat” [NEB: “took his seat”] to mean “he seated him,” i.e., that Pilate seated Jesus.¹³ If such is the intended meaning of the text, we have here a story of Pilate seating Jesus on the tribunal in order to display him to the people with the words, “Here is your king!” However, the meaning of the Greek is by no means certain, and it is entirely possible that Pilate, not Jesus, was the one said to have taken his seat. What is clear is that the words, “Here is your king,” in the second passage are parallel to Pilate’s words on the first passage: “Behold the Man!” In the former passage (John 19:4–5), we find clear evidence of the writer’s bizarre method of using the source story while reworking parts of it into his own words: a process producing a certain tension and obscure contradictory quality to the account. We repeat the first passage: “Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, ‘Here he is; I am bringing him out to let you know that I find no case against him’; and Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. ‘Behold the Man!’ said Pilate.”

The only explicit meaning of Pilate’s words from this passage is that he finds no case against Jesus. This, of course, is the innocent Pilate, the one who sympathizes with Jesus, the partial Pilate whom the evangelists love to describe by way of contrast to the guilty Jesus. But how can the inconsistency between the benevolent Pilate and his cruel public display of Jesus be explained? According to John, Pilate took Jesus out to inform the Jews by this very act that he considered

13. See: Brown (*op. cit.*, n. 3), pp. 880–881; Schnackenburg (*op. cit.*, n. 3), p. 305.

him guiltless. But while the author's intention is clear, the story itself is illogical and completely unrealistic. We must therefore suppose that the writer of the gospel worked the motif of a kind and understanding Pilate into our source, and that the original story ran something like this: "Pilate brought Jesus out, and Jesus was wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. 'Behold the Man!' Said Pilate." We have already seen that "Behold the Man!" is parallel to "Here is your King!" However, even more significant is the fact that Jesus is wearing the "royal" apparel in which he had been clothed by the Roman soldiers for their ceremony of ridicule, in which he was hailed in mock-acclamation: "Hail, King of the Jews!" According to John, immediately after this episode Pilate took him out thus attired and declared, "Behold the Man!" If it can be shown that these words were appropriate to an acclamation, then, according to this gospel's Jewish-Christian source, Pilate had no intention of pronouncing Jesus guiltless; on the contrary, it would demonstrate that the Prefect took an active part in the parody of acclaiming Jesus as the "King of the Jews." Here we have the same Pilate who ordered the provocative inscription, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (in three languages) affixed to Jesus' cross, refusing to remove it despite the protests of the high priests. Even during the negotiations for the release of a prisoner, Pilate mockingly referred to Jesus as "King of the Jews" (John 18:39; Mark 15:9). One scholar rightly points out that, "In John the episode develops the motif of Jesus' kingship. Acknowledged by Pilate as the 'King of the Jews'... crowned and invested by the soldiers... Jesus now undergoes another ceremony in the coronation ritual; he is brought out, royally bedecked and empurpled, to be presented to his people for acclamation. In John's eyes Israel's long wait for its messianic king thus comes to ironic fulfillment."¹⁴ In our opinion, however, what we have here is not a theological statement on the part of John; rather, it is the description of a parody of royal acclamation, a mock-ceremony for Jesus staged by the soldiers which reached its climax with the active participation of the Roman prefect himself. The story itself was not produced by John, but by his Jewish-Christian source.

The meaning of the expression "Behold the Man" became clearer to me after hearing a lecture (subsequently published) by Saul Lieberman.¹⁵ The ceremony of acclamation (Latin: *acclamatio*) was a highly significant one in the ancient world; the kings of the various lands, as well as the Roman emperors, were traditionally

14. Brown, p. 890.

15. S. Lieberman, "Qeles Qilusin," *'Aley 'Ayin* [S. Schocken Festschrift] (Jerusalem, 1948-52), pp. 75-81. See, in particular, p. 81 and notes 48 and 49. See also: E.R. Smothers, "ΚΑΔΟΣ in Acclamation," *Traditio* (New York, 1947), V, pp. 1-57; *Der Kleine Pauly — Lexikon der Antike* (Munich, 1979), I, pp. 30-31; *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart, 1950), I, pp. 216-233 (Th. Klausner).

acclaimed in antiquity. We have already discussed the parodies of acclamation which occurred both when Agrippa visited Alexandria and also after the Jewish rebellion against Rome in Emperor Trajan's time, which also took place in Alexandria, had been quelled. We have also studied the mock-ceremony in which Roman soldiers acclaimed the captive Jesus of Nazareth prior to his crucifixion. The crucial question is whether "Behold the Man!" is a possible phrase of acclamation. In his article, Lieberman states that, "for the most part, pointing the finger and saying, 'That is he!' is nothing short of acclamation," presenting instructive evidence on the basis of earlier research.¹⁶ In one Greek source, we read, "Each one will point at him, saying, 'That is he.'"¹⁷ A Latin poet writes: "It is very fine when one points at you and says, 'That is he.'"¹⁸ Lieberman also brings comparable material from the Rabbinic tradition. Thus, when we are told that Pilate brought Jesus out in royal apparel and said, "Behold the Man," this would indicate that he intended, by the use of that particular phrase, to mockingly "acclaim" Jesus king of the Jews, thus participating in an acclamation spoof initiated by his soldiers.¹⁹ In addition to these proofs, one must bear in mind that, according to John 19:6, the high priests and their henchmen reacted to Pilate's "Behold the Man!" with the cry of "Crucify! Crucify him!" Some scholars believe this call, too — which is found also in the synoptic gospels — to be another expression of acclamation;²⁰ the parallel evidence certainly supports such an hypothesis. According to the story, Pilate's presentation of the beaten and humiliated Jesus is met by the vociferous response of the high priests to crucify him. The interpretation we have proposed for "Behold the man!" is based on both internal analysis of the text and on historical and linguistic parallels; for the present, it remains the only reasonable interpretation.

The picture described is thus both consistent and striking. The Roman soldiers clothed Jesus in a purple garment, put a crown of thorns on his head, and mockingly acclaimed him as King of the Jews. The Roman Prefect then brought him out and presented him, thus attired, before the assembled Jews, pointed at him and hailed him in the accepted formula of acclamation: "Behold the Man!" The high priests then responded by demonstratively crying out: "Crucify! Crucify him!"²¹ Of course, this picture was not painted by the Evangelist John,

16. C. Sittl, *Die Gebärden der Griechen und Römer* (Leipzig, 1890), pp. 52–53.

17. Lucianus, *Somn.*, 11: τῶν ὀρόντων ἕχαστος τὸν πλησίον χινησας δεῖξει σε τῷ δαχτύλῳ οὗτος ἐχεινος λέγων.

18. *Persius* 1, 28: *At pulchrum est digito monstrari et dicier: hic est.* The same exclamation appears in Martialis, *Epigrams* 5, 13, 3.

19. Does the linguistic form of "Behold the Man!" indicate that it might originally have been written in Hebrew (i.e., *hiney ha-ish*)? This is possible, but not certain. Sittl, *op. cit.*, p. 53, suggests checking whether the Latin *ecce* is the word that accompanies pointing one's finger. The entire matter requires further investigation.

20. This material is presented in the *Realexikon* (*op. cit.*, n. 15), p. 218.

21. See: D. Flusser, "The Trial and Death of Jesus," *op. cit.*, in particular p. 143.

the author of this gospel, but it underlies the story. As we have seen, it seems to be the description which was portrayed in John's Jewish-Christian source. However, one must ask whether this portrayal is a faithful one, or whether it was dictated by the nationalist Jewish-Christian bias of the author of this source. In other words: did Pilate himself take part in the mock-acclamation of Jesus?

Our sources leave no doubt as to Pilate's cruelty and hatred for the Jewish people.²² Furthermore, it can easily be proven that the man loved pomp and ceremony. When it came to Jesus, not only did he order the inscription "King of the Jews" affixed to the cross, but he himself used the term mockingly when he referred to Jesus as the king of the Jews earlier in the "trial." As to whether Pilate actually participated in the mock-acclamation, we have already seen that, in a similar incident in Alexandria towards the end of the year 117, a Roman prefect himself took part in a mock-acclamation aimed at the Jews.²³ It is not impossible, then, that Pilate, blinded by his hatred of the Jews and drawn by his predilection for pointless ceremonies, participated in this mock-acclamation of the King of the Jews, thereby performing an act which was both provocative and politically unwise. However, it is precisely the folly of such a demonstration of might and derision on the part of Rome's official representative which should make us doubly cautious in our assessment of the story's authenticity. Caution is further dictated by another detail mentioned above. According to John — here, again, based upon his Jewish-Christian source — a cohort of Roman soldiers participated in Jesus' capture as well (John 18:3, 12), while in Mark (15:16–20) and, following him, Matthew (27:27–31), the Jews handed Jesus over to the Romans, and the Roman cohort only appeared at the time of the acclamation. The latter seems more reasonable from a historical point of view for, as we have already noted, the story of the cooperation between the High Priest's men and the Roman soldiers during Jesus' arrest appears to stem from the anti-Roman bias of John's source.²⁴

22. Pilate's negative attitude toward the Jews and his contempt for their religious beliefs can be seen in the type of coins minted in Judea. Every other Roman Prefect took care not to mint coins bearing symbols of pagan worship. Not so Pilate: he minted coins portraying idol worship. See: M. Stern, in *The Jewish People in the First Century* (Assen, 1974), I, pp. 336, 350.

23. See above, note 7.

24. There is another difference in the sequence of events in Mark and John. According to Mark, the Roman soldiers' mock-acclamation took place *after* Pilate had agreed to crucify Jesus and had already turned him over to the troops, who crucified him immediately after the acclamation. In John, the acclamation took place at the time of the negotiations between Pilate and the high priests, *before* Jesus was condemned to crucifixion (John 19:16). However, one should note that in John (19:1), Mark (16:15), and Matthew (27:26), Pilate's order that Jesus be flogged precedes the soldiers' mock-ceremony; this entire question demands further consideration. On the difference between Mark and John concerning the site of the flogging, see: Schnackenburg, III, pp. 291–292. An extremely instructive discussion of the mock-acclamation of Jesus and parallel occurrences in antiquity appears in Th. Birt, *Aus dem Leben der Antike* (Leipzig, 1922), pp. 189–202.

The historical question of Pilate's participation in the mock-acclamation of Jesus is interesting and important in and of itself. However, our primary concern is Pilate's exclamation, "Behold the Man!" the meaning of which in the immediate context of the Gospel of John is by no means clear. These words can only be understood by assuming that here, as elsewhere, John has worked into his book a Jewish-Christian source imbued with hatred of Rome and her representatives. According to this source, Pilate's participation in the mock-acclamation of Jesus was a kind of crowning touch of the Romans' vile debasement of Jesus, the messianic king of the Jews. Pilate's true character is portrayed faithfully in this role — he is the same cruel, cynical hater of Israel we know from the Jewish sources. Furthermore, by means of the parallel evidence we have been able to clarify the meaning of the phrase "Ecce Homo." This is the attested formula of acclamation in antiquity.

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