SEJANUS, PILATE, AND THE DATE OF THE CRUCIFIXION

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It seems paradoxical that the event which has divided our reckoning of time into years B.C. and A.D. should itself seem largely undatable. The birth of Christ is variously assigned to the years ranging from 7 to 2 B.C. The *terminus ad quem* must certainly be the death of Herod the Great, since the king was very much alive during the visit of the Magi in the Christmas story.[1] According to Josephus, Herod died soon after an eclipse of the moon and not long before a Passover.[2] Emil Schürer's chronology of Herod's reign from the accounts of Josephus, which has long been standard, identifies this as the lunar eclipse which took place on the night of March 12/13, 4 B.C., and which would have been visible in Judea. It also occurred one month before the Passover that year.[3] On this basis, the birth of Jesus could not have been later than the spring of 4 B.C., and most likely took place in the winter of 5/4 B.C.[4]

But the recent discussion by W. E. Filmer in *Journal of Theological Studies* has reopened the question on the date of Herod's death. On January 9, 1 B.C., another lunar eclipse occurred which was total in the Judean area, as compared to only four digits on the earlier occasion. Filmer adduces considerable evidence in support of the 1 B.C. eclipse as that cited by Josephus in connection with Herod's death. According to Jewish tradition in the *Megillat Ta'anit,* 2 Shebat, a holiday probably commemorating the death of Herod, occurred *before* the eclipse of 4 B.C., but fifteen days *after* that of 1 B.C. Moreover, the traditional dating of Herod's accession as 40 B.C.—when he was declared king by the Romans—or 37 B.C.—when he actually conquered Jerusalem—Filmer considers erroneous in view of other evidence from Josephus, Appian, Dio, and Jewish calculation by Sabbatic years. The dates should be, respectively, 39 and 36 B.C., he argues. Therefore, when Josephus states that Herod died 37 years after the former date and 34 after the latter,[5] the year 1 B.C. would indeed result on the basis of the accession-year system used by Josephus, i.e., the common Near Eastern reckoning that the first year of a king's reign dated from the new year's day after his accession, the inaugural months counting only as his "accession year." This calculation would also make Herod 70 years old at the time of his death, the age attested by Josephus, rather than 67 or 68 had he died in 4 B.C. Filmer concludes "that Herod died a little over a fortnight

1. Matthew 2:1; cf. also Luke 1:5ff.
2. Josephus, *Antiq.*, xvii, 6, 4; and xvii, 9, 3.
3. See the discussion by Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1896ff.), I, i, 465.
4. Cf. Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 230ff.
5. Josephus, *Antiq.*, xvii, 8, 1; *Wars*, i, 33, 8.

after the total eclipse of the moon on the night of 9 January, 1 B.C."[6] According to this calculation, the birth of Christ could have occurred as late as 2 B.C.

A major difficulty in this otherwise attractive thesis is the chronology of Herod's sons and successors. Josephus' accounts of the reigns of Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip all correlate far better with a 4 B.C. dating for their father's death than the later suggestion. Filmer resorts to coregencies by which the reigns of the first two sons overlapped Herod's by several years, while a textual emendation in the case of Philip adjusts his reign to the suggested revision.[7]

At any rate, the debate on chronology concerning the birth of Christ and the death of Herod seems open once again. And an ultimate solution is still awaited to such altercated questions as the Judean census which presumably occurred when P. Sulpicius Quirinius was "governor of Syria,"[8] as well as to astronomical explanations for the Christmas star as planet conjunction, comet, or nova, all of which shed little further light in any exact determination of the date for the birth of Christ.

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The New Testament, of course, is far more interested in how Jesus' life ended than how it began, and surely the Good Friday trial and crucifixion—central events in history that they became—should be amenable to more precise dating. Indeed they are, although any "precision," according to Professor Finegan's recent thorough study of the problem, must be shared between Friday, April 7, A.D. 30, and Friday, April 3, A.D. 33, "the two dates which are possible, astronomically and calendrically, for the crucifixion."[9] This article will adduce evidence in support of the latter, later dating.

The New Testament provides only four internal clues toward a chronology of Jesus' adult life. They are:

1) Luke 3:1—The public ministry of John the Baptist, which immediately preceded that of Jesus, started "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. . . ."
2) Luke 3:23—"Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age. . . ."
3) John 2:20—"The Jews then said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?'"
4) John 8:57—"The Jews then said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?'"[10]

The first is the most precisely given date in the entire Bible. Its full text reads:

> In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother

6. W. E. Filmer, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, XVII (October 1966), 283-298. The citation is 293.
7. Filmer, *op. cit.*, 296-298.
8. Luke 2:2.
9. Finegan, *op. cit.*, 300.
10. These and succeeding Biblical citations are from the Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise specified.

> Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness; and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching. . . .[11]

Since the administrations of Pilate, Herod Antipas, Philip, Lysanias, and Caiaphas all overlapped any of the several calculations of the "fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius," the problem is immediately reduced to the proper definition of that year.

Most investigators of Roman history would readily identify the "fifteenth year" in terms of the Julian calendar as the fifteenth regnal year since Tiberius succeeded Augustus as *princeps* on the latter's death in August, 767 A.U.C. (14 A.D.), hence 781-82 A.U.C. (28-29 A.D.), a dating system regularly used by Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius. The actual fifteenth regnal year of Tiberius would run from August 19, 28 A.D., to August 18, 29 A.D., so the beginning of John's ministry should have fallen within these dates. Since Roman historians of the time usually dated the first regnal year of a princeps from January 1 of the year following the date of accession, the year 29 would seem intended here.

In 29, however, according to the traditional chronology of his birth in 5-4 B.C., Jesus would have been almost 33 at the start of his ministry following that of John the Baptist, rather than the "thirty years of age" cited in Luke 3:23. For years, therefore, Biblical scholars have proposed an alternative method of reckoning the "fifteenth year" as dating from the time Tiberius jointly ruled the provinces as colleague of Augustus in 12 A.D., rather than from his succession two years later.[12] The Syro-Macedonian calendar, the Jewish, and even the Egyptian calendars have also been used in an attempt to resolve the three-year discrepancy.

But this hardly seems necessary. The statement that Jesus was "*about* thirty years of age" (italics mine; "ωσει ετων τριακοντα") surely is not violated by his being almost thirty-three in fact, and that round numbers expressing someone's age in the New Testament must always be interpreted with a good deal of latitude is demonstrated by the fourth reference above in John 8:57. Here, three years later, Jesus would have been no older than thirty-six, and yet the people say to him, "You are not yet fifty," when certainly "forty" would have been the nearest, most appropriate round number.

On the other hand, if the Filmer chronology of Herod's death in 1 B.C.—and Christ's birth in 2 B.C.—were correct, then there is no discrepancy whatever in the reference to Jesus' being "about thirty years of age." In fact, Filmer uses Luke 3:23 as an additional datum in support of his thesis.[13]

The normal Roman understanding of the fifteenth year as dating

11. Luke 3:1-3a.
12. Suetonius, *Tiberius*, xxi.
13. Filmer, *op. cit.*, 283.

from the accession of Tiberius, then, would seem the most natural also in this instance. Not only is this the method of our chief Roman sources for the early principate—Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio—but a system confirmed by the epigraphy, coinage, and papyri from the Mediterranean world during this era. It seems improbable, moreover, that an event anchored to the regnal years of a Roman emperor would use a system of reckoning those years different from that employed by the princeps and S.P.Q.R. themselves, as well as the Empire in general. It seems further unlikely that the author of Luke-Acts would have dared "ignore" the last two years of the great Augustus and added them to the reign of his successor in this careful calculation of the date of John's opening ministry. And since Luke-Acts is addressed to a "most excellent" (κρατιστε) Theophilus,[14] a form of address used elsewhere by the same author only for a Roman official,[15] the Gospel was likely written for gentile and Roman consumption and thus involved normal Roman chronology. In interpreting "the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar," then, reckoning should proceed not from a co-regency in 12 A.D., but from the death of Augustus and accession of Tiberius in 14—hence 28-29 A.D.

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In connection with Jesus' cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem, which the Johannine account assigns to the first Passover of his public ministry, Jesus responded to the Jews' request for a sign by stating, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." To which his opponents replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"[16] This citation is the only remaining chronological clue to Jesus' adult life in the New Testament, and it is also the most difficult to interpret.

In his *Antiquities,* Josephus states that "in the eighteenth year of his reign," Herod undertook the construction of the Temple.[17] From the immediately preceding context in Josephus, Finegan has demonstrated that this phrase must be interpreted in effect, "having completed the eighteenth year," i.e., in the nineteenth actual year of Herod's reign.[18] Since, according to the traditional chronology, his nineteenth regnal year began in 19 B.C.—dating from his conquest of Jerusalem in 37 B.C. rather than his appointment as king in 40 B.C., the chronological system Josephus uses in the context—the beginning of reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem is datable from 19 B.C. Now, translations of John 2:20 usually imply that the Temple was a-building

14. Luke 1:3.
15. Acts 23:26; 24:2.
16. John 2:20a, RSV and NEB.
17. Josephus, *Antiq.*, xv, 11, 1. Josephus apparently contradicts himself in *Wars*, i, 21, 1, where he states that Herod restored the Temple "in the fifteenth year," though possibly this is an error in the text. The evidence from *Antiq.* seems more reliable here, since the fifteenth year would seem irreconcilably early. This difficulty, however, is more easily resolved in the Filmer chronology, see Filmer, *op. cit.*, 296.
18. Finegan, *op. cit.*, 277.

forty-six years—a process still going on—as in the RSV's and NEB's "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple." Accordingly, the date of the statement would be forty-six years after 19 B.C., or the Passover, hence spring, of 27 A.D. But this would be two years too early for any natural correlation with the fifteenth year of Tiberius.

A further examination of the Greek of the Johannine passage, however, gives this transliteration: "Forty and six years this temple was built" (ωκοδομηθη), an aorist indicative passive which probably denotes a *completed* building operation, not one still going on. The literal sense, then, is: "This temple has been built for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?" Support for this interpretation is provided by Josephus' statement that the "temple itself" (i.e., the sanctuary or inner edifice) "was built by the priests in a year and five months,"[19] whereas the outer courts required a longer eight-year period,[20] but certainly not forty-six. Embellishments were continually being added to the structure, of course, but the verb would seem to connote basic construction. Accordingly, the temple proper, the ναον referred to specifically also in John 2:20—not its terraces and courtyards which, as temple precinct, are designated the ιερον — was completed by 17 B.C., forty-six years from which would bring the date of the first Passover in Jesus' public ministry to 29 or 30 A.D., depending on inclusive or exclusive counting of the years, which accords precisely with the chronology proposed thus far. The two-year "discrepancy" is thus obviated.[21] And alternatively, again, the Herodian chronology of Filmer would not even introduce any such discrepancy.

With the mission of John the Baptist beginning in 28 or 29 A.D., and Jesus' first public Passover in 29 or 30, the Passover of Good Friday should have been at least two and probably three Passovers later, since three Passovers are specifically cited in the Fourth Gospel,[22] while a fourth is implied. This would allow a range of dates 31 to 33 A.D. for the crucifixion. Which year is most appropriate?

Here calendrical considerations provide assistance. The Fourth Gospel states that Jesus was tried and executed on "the day of Preparation for the Passover," when the Passover lamb was slain.[23] Accord-

23. John 19:14.

ing to Exodus 12:6, this took place on the 14th of the Jewish month Nisan. Since all Gospels indicate that this was also the day before the Sabbath or Saturday, i.e. Friday, the problem resolves itself to this question: in which year or years during the period under consideration did Nisan 14 fall on a Friday?

This riddle has been solved astronomically by J. K. Fothering-

19. Josephus, *Antiq.*, xv, 11, 6.
20. Josephus, *Antiq.*, xv, 11, 5.
21. For further discussion of John 2:20 and the "forty-six years," see T. Corbishley, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, XXXVI (1935), 22; George Ogg, *The Chronology of the Public Ministry of Jesus* (1940), 159ff.; and Finegan, *op. cit.*, 276-280.
22. John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55.

ham, Parker and Dubberstein, and others.[24] It happens that Nisan 14 fell on a Friday in both 30 and 33 A.D., but on other days in all all other years between 27 and 34 A.D., the absolute outer limits of possibility for the date of the crucifixion by any method of reckoning. Accordingly, Finegan quite properly concludes, with Fotheringham *et al.*, ". . . the two dates which are possible, astronomically and calendrically, for the crucifixion are: Friday Apr 7, A.D. 30, and Friday Apr 3, A.D. 33."[25]

Though Fotheringham prefers the 33 A.D. dating ("On the whole, I consider that the date A.D. 33 April 3 offers fewer difficulties than any of the others . . ."[26]), Finegan indicates "some preference" for the year 30.[27] How, then, does he work the requisite three Passovers into Jesus' public ministry, if it began in 28 or 29 A.D.? By rolling back the "fifteenth year" of Tiberius to 26 A.D., using the familiar resort of reckoning from the princeps' co-regency in 12 rather than Augustus' death in 14 A.D. Otherwise, Finegan lets both dates stand for the scholar's choice.

The evidence submitted below strongly supports a choice in favor of 33 A.D. Not only would the later date obviate the distasteful, unlikely, and somewhat forced "joint rule" theory—which ought to be given decent burial against the plain evidence of Roman history—but there is a very substantial, and hitherto unnoticed, argument from the history of the Tiberian principate itself.

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The politics and policies of Rome vis-à-vis Palestine are regularly scanted in New Testament scholarship: events in Judea are usually appraised through Christian or Jewish eyes, but rarely Roman. And yet is was by the decision of a Roman prefect of Judea (*not* procurator)[28] that Jesus was crucified.

It seems more than probable that in 26 A.D., Pontius Pilate was nominated to succeed Valerius Gratus as *praefectus Iudaeae* by L.

24. J. K. Fotheringham, "The Evidence of Astronomy and Technical Chronology for the Date of the Crucifixion," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, XXXV (1934), 146-162; Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology, 626 B.C.—A.D. 75*, 3rd edition (Providence: Brown University Press, 1956), 46ff.; and Richard W. Husband, *The Prosecution of Jesus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1916), 34-69.
25. Finegan, *op. cit.*, 300.
26. Fotheringham, *op. cit.*, 161.
27. Finegan, *loc. cit.*
28. "*Praefectus Iudaeae*" was Pilate's official title rather than "procurator." The latter familiar ascription is based on what has now proven to be anachronisms in Josephus (*Wars*, ii,9,2) and Tacitus (*Annals*, xv,44). In the summer of 1961, an Italian archaeological expedition found a two-by-three-foot stone at Caesarea in Palestine with the following important inscription, as reconstructed by Antonio Frova: "CAESARIENS. TIBERIEVM PONTIVS PILATVS PRAEFECTVS IVDAEAE DEDIT." See Antonio Frova, "L'Iscrizione di Ponzio Pilato a Cesarea," *Rendiconti Istituto Lombardo* (Accademia di Scienze e Lettere), 95 (1961), 419-34. This inscription is also discussed by B. Lifshitz, "Inscriptions latines de Césarée," *Latomus*, XXII (1963), 783; and Attilio Degrassi, "Sull'Iscrizione di Ponzio Pilato," *Rendiconti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche, XIX (Marzo-Aprile 1964), 59-65. Despite their reconstructions, Frova's original suggestion seems most appropriate. —Clearly, then, governors of Judea were called prefects during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius. Claudius first changed their title to procurator. The New Testament very accurately refrains from calling Pilate procurator, using instead ηγεμων, governor.

Aelius Sejanus, Tiberius' notorious prefect of the Praetorian Guard, whose conspiracy would be exposed five years later.[29] Philo identifies Sejanus as a dedicated anti-Semite, referring to his "policy of attacking the Jews"[30] by inventing "false slanders against the Jewish inhabitants of Rome . . . because he wished to do away with the nation."[31] Sejanus appears to have been influential in fostering an anti-Semitic attitude also in Tiberius. In 19 A.D., the princeps compelled the Jews to burn their religious vestments and expelled them from Rome, conscripting 4,000 of them into the army and packing them off to Sardinia.[32]

Undoubtedly it was Pontius Pilate's implementation of Sejanian policy in Palestine which caused the familiar imbroglios with the Jews during his administration which are recorded by Josephus. Shortly after Pilate's arrival in Judea, his troops marched into Jerusalem carrying iconic medallions with the imperial image or bust among their regimental standards. This act occasioned a five-day mass Jewish demonstration at Caesarea, the provincial capital, which sought removal of the ensigns since they violated Jewish law concerning graven images.[33] Because the people seemed ready to die for their convictions in this matter, Pilate relented and ordered the offensive standards removed.[34]

Later he constructed an aqueduct for Jerusalem but paid for it with funds from the Corban, the Temple treasury. This sparked another riot, which was put down only after much bloodshed.[35] A further uproar must have occurred in connection with an event cited in one of the Gospels—without further explanation—concerning "Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices."[36]

While Pilate's apparently harsh conduct on these occasions may have some slight justification, it is clear that a provincial governor answering directives from the anti-Semitic Sejanus would act in a manner parallel to this. Ethelbert Stauffer has also demonstrated that the *quadrans* coinage from 30-31 A.D. which Pilate minted in Judea showed a crosier (*lituus*) stamped on the obverse, the symbol

29. Tiberius retired to Campania and Capri in 26 A.D., leaving the affairs of government largely in the hands of Sejanus. See Tacitus, *Annals* iv, 41, 57; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, xli.
30. Philo, *In Flaccum*, i, 1.
31. Philo, *De Legatione ad Gaium*, xxiv, 159-161. Cf. also Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, ii, 5.
32. Suetonius, *Tiberius*, xxxvi; Josephus, *Antiq.* xviii, 3, 5, though Josephus attributes the immediate cause for the expulsion to four Jewish charlatans in the Fulvia scandal. See also E. Mary Smallwood, "Some Notes on the Jews under Tiberius," *Latomus*, XV (Juillet-Septembre 1956), 314-329.
33. Exodus 20: 4-5.
34. Josephus, *Antiq.*, xviii, 3, 1; *Wars*, ii, 9, 2-3. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, ii, 5, 7ff., is just a reflection of Josephus. A fresh interpretation of this incident is provided by Carl H. Kraeling, "The Episode of the Roman Standards at Jerusalem," *Harvard Theological Review*, XXXV (October 1942), 263-289.
35. Josephus, *Antiq.*, xviii, 3, 2; *Wars*, ii, 9, 4.
36. Luke 13:1.

of the pagan Roman augur, which must certainly have been offensive to the Jews.[37]

Whether motivated by direct order or indirect suggestion from Sejanus, Pilate's conduct appears bold, even harsh toward the Jews, with little fear of repercussions or official complaints from them. The prefect of Judea was not in a defensive posture.

Contrast this portrait of the man with the Pilate of Good Friday, whose lineaments are so clearly drawn in the Gospels. There are parallels, to be sure: the harsh attitude still shows in his bluster with the *accusatores,* the Jewish religious establishment. But when the prosecution plays its trump—*"If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; every one who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar"* (John 19:12)—Pilate's till-then resolute defense of Jesus crumbles and he gives way to the popular demand for crucifixion. What changed Pilate's mind at this point?

One fact seems abundantly clear: *if* Tiberius were still firmly dedicated to a Sejanus-inspired policy of anti-Semitism, the Jewish authorities would surely not have dared make such a veiled threat to send a written appeal if not a full delegation to Rome to complain of Pilate's adjudication—this, after all, is what their statement all but suggests. Any such embassy would, at best, have been sent packing by Sejanus; at worst, he would probably have launched a severe countersuit against the Judeans for daring to indict his appointee who was carrying out his policies. It is unlikely that Tiberius would even have received any message of complaint or heard such a delegation, ensconced as he was on the isle of Capri, with Sejanus handling all his affairs in Rome and controlling all correspondence between the mainland and Capri.[38] In fine, before the fall of Sejanus, the prosecution's statement in John 19:12 would have been a meaningless threat, which Pilate would simply have ignored or even scorned.

Applying this consideration to the problem of dating the crucifixion of Jesus, it becomes clear that if Good Friday were on April 7, 30 A.D., the threat of appealing to Tiberius would indeed have been impotent and empty: at that time, Sejanus was approaching his greatest successes at Rome. His campaign against the House of Agrippina had all but triumphed. The Senate voted that his birthday should be celebrated publicly, and gilded statues of him were being erected throughout Rome. Whenever public officials consulted Tiberius, they now always consulted Sejanus as well. His mansion was besieged with delegations. Public prayers and sacrifices were offered "in behalf of Tiberius and Sejanus," while oaths were now sworn "by the Fortunes of Tiberius and Sejanus."[39] In a short time, he would be named consul with Tiberius for the year 31. Then, if the tribunician power

37. Ethelbert Stauffer, "Zur Münzprägung und Judenpolitik des Pontius Pilatus," *La Nouvelle Clio,* I and II (1949-1950), 495-514.
38. Tacitus, *Annals,* iv, 41.
39. Dio Cassius, lviii, 2, 7ff.; lviii, 3, 8.

were conferred on him as well, it would virtually have rendered him *consors imperii* with Tiberius, *de facto* joint emperor and successor.

All this, of course, was known throughout the Empire—it was information especially dreaded by the Jews—and the prosecution at Jesus' trial would hardly have risked antagonizing Sejanus by making the threat to Pilate cited above. Or, had they made the threat anyway, Pilate could cheerfully have ignored it, protected as he was by the active anti-Semitism of Sejanus.

But the Sejanian conspiracy was exposed and Sejanus himself executed on October 18, 31 A.D. One result was a dramatic change in imperial policy: Tiberius quickly shifted from an anti- to a pro-Semitic attitude, or at least a principle of toleration, which Philo carefully records as follows, an additional demonstration that up to October of 31, Tiberius also had been anti-Semitic:

> Tiberius . . . knew at once after Sejanus's death that the accusations made against the Jewish inhabitants of Rome were false slanders. . . . And he charged his procurators in every place to which they were appointed to speak comfortably to the members of our nation in the different cities [i.e., Jews], assuring them that the penal measures did not extend to all but only to the guilty, who were few, and to disturb none of the established customs but even to regard them as a trust committed to their care, the people as naturally peaceable, and the institutions as an influence promoting orderly conduct.[40]

Now the vulnerable and defensive posture of Pontius Pilate on Good Friday makes immediate sense. Obviously, he was one of the provincial governors who received the communication from Tiberius cited by Philo. Moreover, ever since late in 31, when news reached Palestine of the fall of his patron, Sejanus, Pilate had doubtless been living under his political sword of Damocles, wondering if the "Tiberian terror" in uprooting supporters of the fallen minister and murderer of the princeps' son Drusus would extend to the provinces. The fact that Pilate had probably not been in personal contact with Sejanus for the last six years likely saved him at the time, though he realized his now-vulnerable position and undoubtedly strove to show his loyalty to Tiberius while also adjusting to the new directives concerning the Jews.[41]

Probably against this background the otherwise bizarre incident of the golden shields is to be explained. Philo records that Pilate hung gold-coated shields *επιχρυσους ασπιδφς* in Herod's palace at Jerusalem, which bore a simple, aniconic inscription to the effect that Pilate had dedicated the shields in honor of Tiberius. Indignant

40. Philo, *De Legatione ad Gaium*, xxiv, 159-161, F. H. Colson's translation in The Loeb Classical Library, X, pp. 81-83.

41. It seems more than coincidental that no *quadrans* coin in Palestine after 30/31 A.D. shows the despised pagan *lituus* symbol. Evidently Pilate stopped minting something which would be offensive to the Jews. See Stauffer, *loc. cit.*, and, on Pilate's coinage in general: P. L. Hedley, "Pilate's Arrival in Judea," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, XXXV (1934), 56-57; A. Kindler, "More Dates on the Coins of the Procurators," *Israel Exploration Journal*, VI (1956), 54-57; and B. Oestreicher, "A New Interpretation of Dates on the Coins of the Procurators," *Israel Exploration Journal*, IX (1959), 193-195.

at this otherwise innocent Romanizing touch, the people of Jerusalem staged a mass protest under the leadership of the four sons of Herod the Great. When Pilate refused to remove the shields—they were imageless and should not have been offensive—the leaders of the protest dispatched letters of complaint to Tiberius. According to Philo, the princeps angrily ordered Pilate to transfer the shields to the temple of Augustus in Caesarea.[42]

Clearly, this episode must have taken place *after* the fall of Sejanus, since the action of the petitioners presumed a patronizing attitude toward Judaism on the part of Tiberius. More specifically, this incident may well have occurred during the Passover of 32 A.D., as A. D. Doyle has aptly suggested, since all four Herodian princes and Pilate would hardly have been in Jerusalem at the same time except for so major a festival as this.[43] And if the complaint concerning the shields which was signed by Herod Antipas and his brothers *were* the cause of the enmity between Pilate and Herod mentioned in the Passion story at Luke 23:12—Doyle's commendable hypothesis—then this would further establish the crucifixion as occurring in the year 33, since Pilate would have learned of the written appeal only *after* the Passover of 32.

Pilate would certainly remain in a continuing defensive position vis-à-vis the Jews at the Passover of 33. Their threat of appealing to Caesar was now a very real, a very practical recourse for the prosecution. Though for another reason, such an appeal had already taken place—if, as seems reasonable, the shield episode is datable to 32 A.D.

But totally apart from any involvement of the golden shields affair, which, while strongly supporting the case for a crucifixion in 33 is dispensable to the central argument, the fact remains that the Pilate who was under the protection of Sejanus in 30 was dangerously exposed after his fall late in 31. April of 33 would have been a mere sixteen months after news arrived in Palestine of the death of the praetorian prefect, so Pilate's position was still freshly vulnerable. He could not tolerate a Jewish appeal to Rome in the case of one, Jesus of Nazareth, since the complaint would undoubtedly be framed about the charge already presented at Pilate's tribunal: that Jesus had made treasonable claims to kingship. At a time when Tiberius was prosecuting adherents of Sejanus precisely under the rubric of *maiestas*—treason to state and emperor—the prosecution's threat in John 19:12 was masterfully barbed and weighted. Add to this Tiberius' direct order to his governors, cited by Philo, warning them to uphold Jewish customs and institutions. Furthermore, the threat was accurate even to the detail of what fate might be in store for Pilate if an appeal to Tiberius became necessary: "If you release this

42. Philo, *De Legatione ad Gaium*, xxxviii, 299-305.
43. A. D. Doyle, "Pilate's Career and the Date of the Crucifixion," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, XLII (1941), 190-193.

man, you are *not Caesar's friend. . . .*" He would be excluded from the inner elite governing circle of *amici Caesaris,* whose membership was reserved for senators and those equestrians, high in government service, who were specifically called to this status. Loss of the rank *amicus Caesaris* led to political and social ostracism, even suicide.[44]

Answering the immediate, compelling call of natural self-interest, Pontius Pilate, in his present, vulnerable position, had little choice but to capitulate. A threatened appeal which would have been meaningless on April 7, 30 A.D. was terribly formidable on April 3, 33.

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The latter date for the crucifixion, then, is the only option in the vast scholarly literature on this much altercated question which satisfies *all* the following requirements:

1. It allows the "fifteenth year of Tiberius" to be interpreted in its proper Roman setting and sense, rather than requiring resort to an unlikely "co-regency" dating system.
2. At the same time, it allows also for the requisite three or four Passovers in Jesus' public ministry which are required by the Fourth Gospel.
3. It is the only date which accounts for Pilate's attitude on Good Friday and makes sense of the prosecution's threat in John 19:12.
4. It is a correct equation, astronomically and calendrically, of Friday, Nisan 14.
5. It is the only date which integrates successfully with all appropriate chronological clues in the Gospel sources, without requiring heavy scholarly manipulation.

Perhaps it is time that the welter of datings for the crucifixion —29, 30, 32, or 33 A.D. are the most popular candidates—be finally resolved. In any such resolution, April 3, 33 A.D. can make an unusually strong case for itself.[45]

44. Suetonius, *Tiberius,* xlvi. See also Ernst Bammel, "Philos tou Kaisaros," *Theologische Literaturzeitung,* 77 (April 1952), 206-210.

45. Patristic evidence, unfortunately, is very unreliable in any attempt to arrive at a precise date for the crucifixion. No two church fathers seem to agree. Others, like Eusebius, offer different dates in different writings, though in one version of his *Chronicon,* Eusebius supports a 33 A.D. dating in stating that Jesus suffered "in the nineteenth year of the reign of Tiberius," which he further qualifies by citing a reference from Phlegon regarding an abnormal solar eclipse and earthquake which took place that year. (Eusebius, *Chronicon,* ii, p. 535, ed. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca.*) The eclipse, of course, is intended as a possible explanation of the darkness which the Gospels record in connection with the crucifixion (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). According to Tertullian, the darkness was a "cosmic" or "world event," (*Apologeticus* xxi, 20). Phlegon, a Greek from Caria writing a chronology soon after 137 A.D., reported that in the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad there was "the greatest eclipse of the sun," and that "it became night in the sixth hour of the day [i.e., noon] so that the stars even appeared in the heavens. There was a great earthquake in Bithynia, and many things were overturned in Nicaea." (Fragment from the 13th book of Phlegon, *Olympiades he Chronika,* ed. by Otto Keller, *Rerum Naturalium Scriptores Graeci Minores* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1877) I, 101, translation mine.) An actual eclipse of the sun, of course, was impossible on Nisan 14, since the Passover occurred at the time of the full moon. Nevertheless, Phlegon's reference to the unnatural darkness and earthquake form an interesting parallel to the Gospel record, and the date he assigns these phenomena provides additional astronomical support for the chronology proposed above; "the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad" extended from July 1, 32 A.D. to June 30, 33. Since Christ was crucified in the spring, 33 A.D. would be the year.