

This is the second of two posts in which I lay out (part of) my case for why I think Jesus was not given a decent burial by Joseph of Arimathea. I am not devoting a post to the second of my three specific arguments - where I talk about typical Roman burial practices for criminals - simply because Craig Evan's does not do much with it in his counter-argument. But my section on Pontius Pilate is especially important, as you'll see when I begin to summarize and respond to Craig's essay.

The Policies of Pontius Pilate in Particular

My third specific reason for doubting the burial tradition has to do with the Roman rule of Judea at the time. One of the chief regrets of any historian of early Christianity is that we do not have more - lots more - information about Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea from 26-36 CE, who, among many other things, condemned Jesus to be crucified. What we do know about him, however, all points in the same direction. He was a fierce, violent, mean-spirited ruler who displayed no interest at all in showing mercy and kindness to his subjects and showed no respect for Jewish sensitivities.

Pilate's governorship is lightly documented in the surviving material record, as we have some coins that were issued during his reign and an inscription, discovered in modern times at Caesarea, that mentions him. The New Testament record is somewhat mixed, for reasons I earlier mentioned. As time wore on, Christian authors, including those of our Gospels, portrayed Pilate as more and more sympathetic toward Jesus and more and more opposed to the recalcitrant Jews who demand Jesus' death. As I have suggested, this progressive exoneration of Pilate serves clear anti-Jewish purposes, so that the accounts of Jesus' trial in the later Gospels - Matthew, Luke, and John - must be taken with a pound of salt. In an earlier tradition of Luke we get a clearer picture what the man was like, as we hear, very opaquely, of "the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices" (Luke 13:1). This sounds like Pilate had Jews murdered while they were performing their religious duties. It's an unsettling picture.

But it coincides well with...

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