



Dedication by Pontius Pilate in Judea (CIIP II, 1277)

pontius_pilate_inscription.jpeg



[1]

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Dedication.

Original Location/Place: The 'Tiberium' of Caesarea Maritima. Later in the Theatre.

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Israel Museum. Inv. no.: IAA 1961-529

Date: 26 CE to 36 CE

Physical Characteristics: Inscribed block, damaged in antiquity when it was reused in later building works, firstly as part of a possible well-head, owing to the semi-circular shape cut into the right side. It was reused a second time as a step in the 4th century CE theatre of Caesarea Maritima, which was itself re-modelled in the Byzantine period. The left side of the block has been badly damaged, resulting in the loss of the left side of the inscription and almost all of its final fourth line.

Material: Limestone.

Measurements: Height: 82 cm

Width: 65 cm

Depth: 20 cm

Letter heights: 6 cm

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Publications: Frova, Antonio, "L'iscrizione di Ponzio Pilato a Caesarea" in *Rendiconti*, 95 (1961), p. 419-34
CIIP II, 1277

(=AE 1963, 104 cf. AE 1964, 39 = AE 1971, 477 = AE 1981, 850 = AE 1991, 1578 = AE 1999, 1681 = AE 2000, 1518 = AE 2002, 1556 = AE 2005, 1583)

Commentary: This inscription was discovered during the Italian excavations of Caesarea Maritima in 1961; it had been moved from its original location (which is unknown) and reused as building material, first possibly as a well head, and then again in the fourth century CE as a step in the theatre. This reuse has resulted in some damage to the text of the inscription, but careful reconstruction and discussion by a number of scholars has rendered it an important source for the Roman administration of Judea in the reign of Tiberius. Most significantly, it attests to the existence of Pontius Pilate as the leading Roman citizen and governor of the province, which fits with the records given in a number of literary sources (e.g.: Philo of Alexandria, *Embassy to Gaius* 299-305; Josephus, *Jewish War* II.169-174 and *Jewish Antiquities* 18.55-59; Tacitus, *Annals* XV.44; In the New Testament Pilate is mentioned 57 times, including Mark 15; Luke 3:1-2; 13:1; Matthew 27:1-2 amongst numerous others). The inscription also clarifies a minor point of provincial administration; Pilate is named as the *praefectus* (prefect) of Judaea, which indicates his equestrian rank and stresses the military nature of the post (Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, p. 358). As Helen Bond has noted, the fact that Pilate's role was a military prefecture was indicative of the "determination of the early Emperors to hold on to a newly subjugated territory and to bring the native inhabitants under Roman control" (Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*, p. 12). In the early principate, *procurator* referred only to financial officials in both imperial and senatorial provinces; although Tacitus refers to Pilate as a *procurator* in the *Annals of Imperial Rome* (XV.44.4), this title was not widely used for governors of provinces until



the reign of Claudius (Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, p. 358; for the difference between *procurator* and *praefectus*, see Jones, *Studies in Roman Government and Law*, p. 115-25).

The lost lines of the inscription have generated an enormous amount of scholarly discussion; originally four lines long, the initial letters of lines 1-3 and almost all of line 4 have been lost. Lines 2-3 were reconstructed by Antonio Frova to reflect Pilate's official name and title, Prefect of Judea (*Pontius Pilatus praefectus Iudaeae*), as well as the single space at the start of line 2 for the single, abbreviated letter of his *praenomen* (Taylor, "Pontius Pilate", p. 565). There has been much speculation regarding the reconstruction of line 1, however; Carl Lehmann and Kenneth Holum suggested numerous proposals – including *Caesariens(ibus)*; *Dis Augustis*; *Tib(erio) Caes(are) Aug(usto)* – the majority of which were too long to fit the space (see *Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima*, p. 68-71 for a full list of proposals). Line 4 has been reconstructed according to the only visible letter, an apex above a vertical line, indicating the letter "E". Joan Taylor suggested that this "E" may form part of *dedicavit*, with *Tiberieum* in line 1 therefore in the accusative case, giving the translation that Pontius Pilate 'dedicated a Tiberieum' ("Pontius Pilate", p. 565). She further proposed that the missing letters in line 1 should be restored as *divis*, referring to Augustus and Rome, and possibly the living emperor, Tiberius, too ("Pontius Pilate", p. 565). If Pilate had, then, dedicated a *Tiberieum*, what was it? If understood as a noun in the accusative case, *Tiberieum* must refer to a structure built for and dedicated to Tiberius, which early scholarship of this inscription generally understood as having been a small building, possibly one that stands just west of the theatre in Caesarea, which was assumed to have been associated with the imperial cult (for the identification of its location, see Lehmann and Holum, *Joint expedition to Caesarea Maritima*, p. 69). Although this would be the only known usage of *Tiberieum* in reference to a cult-structure, *Caesareum* and *Augustaeum* are both commonly associated with the imperial cult, and a *Hadrianeum* was also dedicated in Caesarea in honour of Hadrian's tour of the east in 130 CE (Lehmann and Holum, *Joint expedition to Caesarea Maritima*, p. 80-2). Tiberius was, however, known to have refused divine honours for himself, and did not permit for associations to be made between himself and other deities in the same manner that Augustus had (see Tacitus, *Annals*, V, 2.1; Suetonius, *Tiberius* XXVI, 1), which has usually been interpreted as a statement that worship of him during his lifetime was banned. Ittai Gradel has suggested, however, that this refusal of divine honours did not extend to the provinces, which can be deduced from inscriptional evidence of dedications to Livia and Tiberius from cities and individuals across the empire (Gradel, *Emperor Worship*, p. 65; 85). If Pontius Pilate did dedicate a Tiberieum in Caesarea, it could, then, have been understood as a means of strengthening the imperial cult in Caesarea; it was the kind of action expected of a Roman prefect, and promoted religious rituals in the provinces in a decidedly Roman context. As Joan Taylor stated, "if a Tiberieum was designed to honour Tiberius, the emperor, it would have been part of the imperial honours system within an Empire wide rubric," which sought to honour the emperor in accordance with what was expected of Pilate as a provincial governor (Taylor, "Pontius Pilate", p. 568). It was, essentially, the right thing to do: to encourage those whom one governed to honour the provincial imperial cult, and not an act directed specifically at (or indeed against the wishes of) the emperor.

However, in 1999 Geza Alföldy proposed an alternative reading, in which the inscription was reconstructed as *[nauti]s Tiberieum / [--- Po]ntius Pilatus / [praef]ectus Iudae[a]e / [ref]eci[t]*, or "for the sailors (?), Pontius Pilate, prefect of Judea, restored the Tiberieum" (Alföldy, "Pontius Pilate und das Tiberieum von Caesarea Maritima" p. 85-108). His re-reading was widely accepted and confirmed by scholars (see e.g. Eck, "The inscriptions of Judea in the 1st and early 2nd century AD," p. 32-34; Eck, *Rome and Judaea*, p. 16, n. 30; Demandt, *Pontius Pilatus*, p. 40-43) who followed his interpretation that the *Tiberieum* referred to one of the monumental lighthouses that marked the entrance of the port of Caesarea; the lighthouses, which had been built by Herod, were described by Josephus, who described the one at the western entrance of the port as being dedicated to Drusus, the brother of Tiberius (*Jewish War*, I. 412; for the port of Caesarea, see Hohlfelder, "Caesarea's Master Harbor Builders," p. 77-101). Geza Alföldy rationalised that the lighthouse at the eastern entrance, may then have been set up in Tiberius's name; by the governorship of Pilate the lighthouse required restoration, hence *refecit* ("restored") in the present inscription (Alföldy, "L'iscrizione di Ponzio Pilato," p. 137-150). Although not set up in connection with the imperial cult, Alföldy's proposition does suggest that structures were built in honour of the imperial family, and undertaken by Jews loyal to Rome, who presumably wanted to emphasise their support of the emperor and his household. While the inscription, and the original structure to which it relates, may have had nothing to do with emperor worship *per se*, it still may be evidence for the positive reception of Rome and her emperors amongst particular groups in Judea, who used the physical character and landscape of their cities in order to express their allegiance.

Geza Alföldy's interpretation of the inscription has refuted the claims of earlier scholarship that the dedication commemorated a structure connected to the imperial cult, and has demonstrated the kind of civic actions that were expected of the Roman governor, such as the maintenance of key infrastructure like the lighthouses of the monumental port of Caesarea Maritima. However, other evidence from Judea does attest to Pontius Pilate's



insistence on Roman religious standards in the province; Joan Taylor noted the bronze coinage, minted in Judea and issued by Pilate, that appeared to depict the instruments used in Roman ritual use. This broke with the tradition of the prefects who came before him, whose coinage made loose references to both Hellenistic and Roman deities that could be easily syncretised with promotion of trade and agricultural production in Judea (see “Pontius Pilate”, p. 556-63). There is also plenty of literary evidence, particularly from Philo of Alexandria, that attests to Pilate’s vigorous insistence upon the application of Roman norms, even when they contravened the privileges put in place by previous Roman governors to take Jewish religious sensitivities in the province into account (see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, p. 383-88 for a summary of Pilate’s actions). The best-known instance of Pilate’s conflict with these religious sensitivities was his setting up of votive shields carrying Tiberius’s name in Herod’s former palace in Jerusalem; Philo states that this was done “not in order to honour Tiberius, but rather to annoy the [Jewish] multitude” (*On the Embassy to Gaius*, 299: ??? ??? ????? ????????? ?????? ? ????? ??? ??????? ?? ??????), which has been interpreted as a statement of Pilate’s anti-Jewish motivations. However, as Joan Taylor noted, Philo acknowledged the obvious purpose of Pilate’s actions (even if he does reject it): the shields were set up precisely to honour the emperor. Although the dedication of a structure connected to the imperial cult and named the “Tiberieum” has now largely been dismissed from the narrative, the issuing of coinage that referred to Roman religious ritual, and the honorific nature of the shields together highlight the extent to which Pilate attempted to maintain a certain set of rigorous religious standards in Judea, and which spoke to a particularly Roman context.

Keywords in the original language:

- [Pontius Pilatus](#) [2]
- [Tiberium](#) [3]
- [Iudaea](#) [4]

Thematic keywords:

- [imperial cult](#) [5]
- [Tiberius](#) [6]
- [Judea](#) [7]
- [divinisation](#) [8]
- [honour](#) [9]
- [province](#) [10]
- [Augustus](#) [11]
- [temple](#) [12]
- [Caesarea Maritima](#) [13]
- [Jewish people](#) [14]
- [Judaism](#) [15]
- [Roman religion](#) [16]
- [Roman governor](#) [17]
- [Roman prefect](#) [18]
- [administration](#) [19]
- [Pontius Pilatus](#) [20]
- [lighthouse](#) [21]
- [port](#) [22]
- [loyalty to Rome](#) [23]

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Text

[Eusebius of Caesarea, Ecclesiastical History II.2.1-4](#) [39]

The communication between Pontius Pilate and the emperor Tiberius about Christ

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Text

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Links

- [1] https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/pontius_pilate_inscription.jpeg?itok=DuhB7Myy
- [2] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/pontius-pilatus>
- [3] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/tiberium>
- [4] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/iudaea>
- [5] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/imperial-cult>
- [6] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/tiberius>
- [7] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/judea>
- [8] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/divinisation>
- [9] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/honour>
- [10] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/province>
- [11] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/augustus>
- [12] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/temple>
- [13] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/caesarea-maritima>
- [14] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/jewish-people>
- [15] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/judaism>
- [16] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/roman-religion>
- [17] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/roman-governor>
- [18] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/roman-prefect>
- [19] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/administration>
- [20] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/pontius-pilatus>
- [21] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/lighthouse>
- [22] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/port>
- [23] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/loyalty-rome>
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- [26] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/pontius-pilate-history-and-interpretation>
- [27] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/inscriptions-judea-1st-and-early-2nd-century-ad-evidence-roman-rule>
- [28] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/rome-and-judaea-five-lectures-roman-rule-palaestina>
- [29] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/pontius-pilatus>
- [30] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/l%E2%80%99iscrizione-di-ponzio-pilato-cesarea>
- [31] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/emperor-worship-and-roman-religion>
- [32] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/caesaraea%E2%80%99s-master-harbor-builders-lessons-learned-lessons-applied>
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- [35] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/history-jewish-people-age-jesus-christ-1>
- [36] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/pontius-pilate-and-imperial-cult-roman-judaea-0>
- [37] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/new-inscription-which-mentions-pilate-%E2%80%98prefect%E2%80%99>
- [38] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/matthew-2711-26>
- [39] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/eusebius-caesarea-ecclesiastical-history-ii21-4>
- [40] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/luke-131-3>
- [41] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/erc-team/caroline-barron>

